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“ ‘Ah ! you did not have such good wine to drink at Valpinson ? ’ ”

IN PERIL OF HIS LIFE

TRANSLATED FROM THE FRENCH OF

EMILE GABORIAU

PEARSON'S LIBRARY EDITION

"Monsieur Lecoq" Vol. 1 "Monsieur Lecoq" Vol. 2

"The Gilded Clique" "The Lerouge Case"

"In Peril of His Life"

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IN PERIL OF HIS LIFE.

PART I.

FIRE AT VALPINSON.

I.

THE facts were these :—

Towards one o'clock on the morning of the 23rd of June, 1871, the Faubourg de Paris, the principal and most densely populated of the outlying districts of the pretty town of Sauveterre was startled by the furious gallop of a horse dashing over the pointed paving-stones. A number of peaceful citizens at once rushed to their bedroom windows. The dark night only allowed them to see a bare-headed peasant, riding a large gray, saddleless mare which he steadily belaboured with his heels and stick. Man and steed eventually turned into the Rue Nationale—formerly Rue Imperiale—crossed the Place du Marche-Neuf, and stopped at last before the fine house which stands at the corner of the Rue du Chateau. This was the residence of the mayor of Sauveterre, M. Seneschal, a former lawyer, and now a member of the General Council of the department.

Having alighted, the peasant seized the bell-knob, and began to ring so furiously, that, in a few moments, the whole house was in an uproar. A minute later, a big, stout, man-servant, his eyes heavy with sleep, came and opened the door, crying out in an angry voice,—“Who are you, my man? What do you want? Have you taken too much wine? Don't you know at whose house you are making such a row?”

"I wish to see the mayor instantly," replied the peasant. "Wake him up!"

M. Seneschal was already wide awake. Dressed in a large dressing-gown of gray flannel, a candlestick in his hand, nervous, and unable to disguise his nervousness, he had just come down into the hall, and had heard all that was said. "Here is the mayor," he exclaimed in a disagreeable tone. "What do you want of him at this hour, when all honest people are in bed?"

Pushing the servant aside, the peasant stepped forward, and without the slightest attempt at politeness, said:—"I come to tell you to send the fire-engine."

"The engine!"

"Yes; at once. Make haste!"

The mayor shook his head. "Hm!" he said, according to a habit he had when he was at a loss what to say or do; "hm, hm!"

And who would not have been embarrassed in his place? To get the engine out, and to assemble the firemen, he had to rouse the whole town; and to do this in the middle of the night was nothing less than to frighten the poor people of Sauveterre, who had heard the drums beating the alarm but too often during the war with the Germans, and then again during the reign of the Commune. Therefore M. Seneschal asked,—“Is it a serious fire?”

"Serious!" exclaimed the peasant. "How could it be otherwise with such a wind as this,—a wind that would blow off the horns of our oxen."

"Hm!" uttered the mayor again. "Hm, hm!"

It was not exactly the first time, since he was mayor of Sauveterre, that he was thus roused by a peasant, who came and cried under his window, "Help! Fire, fire!" At first, filled with compassion, he had hastily called out the firemen, put himself at their head, and hurried to the spot. And when they reached it, out of breath, and perspiring, after having made two or three miles at double-quick pace, they found what? A wretched heap of straw, worth about fifty francs, and almost consumed by the fire. They had had their trouble for nothing. The peasants in the neighbourhood had cried "Wolf!" so often, when there was no reason for it, that, even when the wolf really was there, the townspeople were slow in believing it.

"Let us see," said M. Seneschal; "what is there burning?"

The peasant seemed to be furious at all these delays, and bit his long whip. "Must I tell you again and again," he said, "that everything is on fire,—barns, outhouses, haystacks, the houses, the old castle, and everything? If you wait much longer, you won't find one stone upon another at Valpinson."

The effect produced by this name was prodigious. "What?" asked the mayor in a half-stifled voice, "Valpinson is on fire?"

"Yes."

"At the Count de Chaudieuse's?"

"Of course."

"Fool! why did you not say so at once?" exclaimed the mayor, who hesitated no longer. "Quick!" he said to his servant, "go and get me my clothes. Wait, no! my wife can help me. There is no time to be lost. You run to Bolton, the drummer, and tell him from me to beat the alarm instantly all over the town. Then you run to Captain Parenteau's, and explain to him what is the matter. Ask him to get the keys to the engine-house.—Wait!—when you have done that, come back and put the horse in.—Fire at Valpinson! I shall go with the engine. Go, run, knock at every door, cry, 'Fire! Fire!' Tell everybody to come to the Place du Marche-Neuf."

When the servant had run off as fast as he could, the mayor turned to the peasant, and said,—“As for you, my good man, get on your horse, and reassure the count. Tell them all to take courage, and that we are coming to help them.”

Still the peasant did not move. "Before going back to Valpinson," he said, "I have another commission to attend to in town."

"Why? What is it?"

"I must get the doctor to go back with me."

"The doctor? Why? Has anybody been hurt?"

"Yes, our master, the Count de Claudieuse."

"How imprudent! I suppose he rushed into danger as usual."

"Oh no! He has been shot at twice!"

The mayor of Sauveterre nearly dropped his candlestick. "Shot? Twice?" he said. "Where? when? by whom?"

"Ah! I don't know."

"But —"

"All I can tell you is this. They have carried him into a little barn that was not yet on fire. There I saw him myself lying on the straw, pale like a linen sheet, his eyes closed, and bloody all over."

"Great God! They have not killed him?"

"He was not dead when I left."

"And the countess?"

"Our lady," replied the peasant with an accent of profound veneration, "was in the barn on her knees by the count's side, washing his wounds with fresh water. The two little ladies were there too."

M. Seneschal trembled with excitement. "It is a crime that has been committed, I suppose."

"Why, of course!"

"But by whom? With what motive?"

"Ah! that is the question."

"The count is very passionate, to be sure, violent even; but still he is the best and fairest of men, everybody knows that."

"Everybody knows it."

"He never did any harm to anybody."

"That is what all say."

"As for the countess—"

"Oh!" said the peasant eagerly, "she is a saint of saints."

The mayor tried to come to some conclusion. "The criminal must then be a stranger," observed he. "We are overrun with vagabonds and beggars on the tramp. Not a day passes without a lot of ill-looking fellows appearing at my office, asking for help to get away."

The peasant nodded his head, and said, "That is just what I think. And the proof of it is, that as I came along I made up my mind I would first get the doctor, and then report the crime to the police."

"Don't bother about that," said the mayor. "I will do so myself. In ten minutes I shall see the public prosecutor. Now be off. Don't spare your horse, and tell your mistress that we are all coming after you."

In his whole official career M. Seneschal had never been so terribly shocked. He was losing his head, just as he had done on that unlucky day during the war, when, all of

a sudden, nine hundred *mobiles* fell upon him, and asked to be fed and lodged. Without his wife's help he would never have been able to dress himself. Still he was ready when his servant returned. The good fellow had done all he had been told to do, and at that moment the beat of the drum was heard in the upper part of the town.

"Now put the horse in," said M. Seneschal: "let me find the carriage at the door when I come back."

In the streets he found all in an uproar. From every window a head popped forth, with features expressive either of curiosity or terror; on all sides house-doors were opened, and promptly closed again. "Great God!" thought the mayor, "I hope I shall find Daubigeon at home!" M. Daubigeon, who, after being public prosecutor under the Empire, now served the Republic in the same capacity, was one of M. Seneschal's best friends. He was a man of some forty years of age, with a cunning look in his eye, and a permanent smile on his face. He prided himself, moreover, on being a confirmed bachelor. The good people of Sauveterre scarcely considered him stern and solemn enough for his profession. To be sure, he was very highly esteemed; but his optimism was not popular: he was reproached with being too kind-hearted towards the criminals he had to prosecute, thus indirectly encouraging offences against the law.

On his own side he accused himself of not being inspired with the "holy fire" and, as he expressed it in his own way, "of robbing Themis of all the time he could, to devote it to the friendly Muses." He was a passionate lover of fine books, rare editions, costly bindings, and fine illustrations; and much the larger part of his annual income of about ten thousand francs went in buying them. A scholar of the old-fashioned type, he professed boundless admiration for Virgil and Juvenal, but, above all, for Horace, towards whom he proved his devotion by constant quotations.

Roused, like everybody else, in the midst of his slumbers, this excellent man was hastily putting on his clothes, when his old housekeeper came in, quite excited, and told him that M. Seneschal was there, and wished to see him. "Show him in!" said M. Daubigeon, "show him in!"

And, as soon as the mayor entered, he continued: "Now

tell me the meaning of all this noise, this beating of drums,—

‘Clamorque virum, clangorque tubarum.’”

“A terrible misfortune has happened,” answered the mayor. From the tone of his voice one might have imagined it was he himself who had been afflicted.

The lawyer was so strongly impressed in a similar sense that he exclaimed, “My dear friend, what is the matter? *Quid?* Courage, my friend, keep cool! Remember that the poet advises us, in misfortune never to lose our balance of mind:—

‘Æquam, memento, rebus in arquis,
Servare mentem.’”

“Some scoundrel has set Valpinson on fire?” broke in the mayor.

“You do not say so? Great God!

‘O Jupiter,
Quod verbum audio.’”

“More than that. The Count de Claudieuse has been shot at, and by this time he is probably dead.”

“Oh!”

“You hear the drummer beating the alarm. I am going to the fire; and I have only come here to report the matter officially to you, and to ask you to see that justice be done promptly and energetically.”

There was no need of such a serious appeal to stop at once all the lawyer’s classical quotations. “Enough!” he said eagerly. “Come, let us take measures to catch the wretches.”

When they reached the Rue Nationale, it was as full as at mid-day, for Sauveterre is one of those provincial towns in which an excitement is too rare a treat to be neglected. The sad event had by this time become fully known everywhere. At first the news had been doubted; but when the doctor’s cab had passed the crowd at full speed, escorted by a peasant on horseback, the reports were believed. Nor had the firemen lost time. As soon as the mayor and M. Daubigeon appeared on the Place du Mar

che-Neuf, Captain Parenteau rushed up to them, and, touching his helmet with a military salute, exclaimed: "My men are ready."

"All?"

"There are hardly ten absentees. When they heard that the Count and Countess de Claudieuse were in need, great heavens! they were all ready in a moment."

"Well, then, start and make haste," commanded M. Seneschal. "We shall overtake you on the way: M. Daubigeon and I are going to pick up M. Galpin-Daveline, the investigating magistrate."

They had not far to go.

The magistrate in question had already been looking for them all over the town: he had just reached the place and saw them at once.

In striking contrast with the public prosecutor, M. Galpin-Daveline was a professional man in the full sense of the word, and perhaps a little more. He was the magistrate all over, from head to foot, from the gaiters encasing his ankles to the light auburn whiskers encircling his face. Although he was quite young, no one had ever seen him smile, or heard him make a joke. He was so very stiff, that M. Daubigeon suggested that he had been impaled alive on the sword of justice. At Sauveterre M. Galpin was looked upon as a superior man. He certainly believed himself to be so: hence he was very impatient at being confined to so narrow a sphere of action, considering his brilliant ability wasted upon the prosecution of a chicken-thief or a poacher. But his almost desperate efforts to secure a better office had always been unsuccessful. In vain he had enlisted a host of friends in his behalf. In vain he had thrown himself into politics, ready to serve any party that would serve him. Still M. Galpin's ambition was not easily discouraged; and lately, after a journey to Paris, he had thrown out hints of a great match, which would shortly procure him an influence in high places which he had so far been unable to obtain. When he joined M. Daubigeon and the mayor, he exclaimed, "Well, this is a horrible affair! It will make a tremendous noise."

The mayor wished to give him full details, but he added, "Don't trouble yourself. I know all you know. I met the peasant who had been sent in, and I have ex

amined him." Then turning to the public prosecutor, he remarked, "I think we ought to proceed at once to the place where the crime has been committed."

"I was going to suggest it to you," replied M. Daubignon.

"The gendarmes ought to be warned."

"M. Seneschal has just sent them word."

The investigating magistrate was so much excited, that his cold impassiveness actually threatened to give way for once. "There has been an attempt at murder," he said.

"Evidently."

"Then we can act in concert, and side by side, each one following his own line of duty, investigating the case and preparing for the trial."

An ironical smile passed over the lips of the public prosecutor. "You ought to know me well enough," he said, "to be sure I never interfere with your duties and privileges. I am nothing but a good old fellow, a friend of peace and study :

'*Sum piger et senior, Pieridumque comes.*'"

"Then," exclaimed M. Seneschal, impatient to be off, "nothing keeps us here any longer ; my carriage is ready, let us go !"

II.

As the crow flies there is but a mile from Sauveterre to Valpinson ; still that mile is as long as any two elsewhere. M. Seneschal, however had a good horse, "the best, perhaps, in the *arrondissement*," he said, as he got into his carriage. In ten minutes they had overtaken the firemen, who had left some time before them. And yet these good people, all of them master workmen of Sauveterre, masons, carpenters, and tilers, were hurrying along as fast as they could. They had half a dozen smoking torches with them to light them on the way. They walked, puffing and blowing, along the bad road, pushing before them as they went the two fire-engines, together with a cart on which they had piled their ladders and other tools.

"Keep up, my friends!" said the mayor, as he passed them, "keep up!" Three minutes farther on, a peasant on horseback appeared in the dark, riding along like some forlorn knight of romance. M. Daubigeon at once ordered him to halt.

"You come from Valpinson?" asked M. Seneschal.

"Yes," replied the peasant.

"How is the count?"

"He has come to at last."

"What does the doctor say?"

"He says he will live. I am going to the druggist to get some medicines."

M. Galpin, to hear better, was leaning out of the carriage. He asked,—*"Do they accuse any one?"*

"No."

"And the fire?"

"They have water enough," replied the peasant, "but no engines: so what can they do? And the wind is rising again? Oh, what a misfortune!"

He rode off as fast as he could, while M. Seneschal belaboured his poor horse, which, unaccustomed to such treatment, reared instead of going any faster, and jumped from side to side. The excellent man was in despair. He looked upon this crime as if it had been committed on purpose to disgrace him, and to do the greatest possible injury to his administration.

"For after all," he said, for the tenth time to his companions, "is it natural, I ask you, is it sensible, that a man should think of attacking the Count and the Countess de Claudieuse, the first, the most distinguished and esteemed man in the whole department, the second a lady whose name is synonymous with virtue and charity?" And, without minding the ruts and stones in the road, M. Seneschal went on repeating all he knew about the owners of Valpinson.

The Count Trivulce de Claudieuse was the last scion of one of the oldest families of France. About 1829, when some sixteen years of age, he had entered the navy as ensign, and for many years his visits to Sauveterre were few and far between. In 1859 he had become a captain, and was on the point of being made rear-admiral, when all of a sudden he sent in his resignation, and took up his residence at the chateau of Valpinson, which of all

its former splendour could only show two crumbling towers, and an immense mass of ruin and rubbish. During two years he had lived here alone, building up the old house as well as could be done, and by dint of energy and labour imparting to it the more essential characteristics of modern comfort and luxury. It was thought he would finish his life in this way, when one day it was rumoured that he was going to be married. This report proved true.

One fine morning the Count de Claudieuse left for Paris; and, a few days later, his friends were informed by letter that he had married the daughter of one of his former colleagues, Mademoiselle Genevieve de Tassar. The amazement was universal. The count looked every inch a gentleman, and was very well preserved; but he was at least forty-seven years old, whereas Mademoiselle Genevieve was hardly twenty. Now, if the bride had been poor, people would have understood the match, and approved it: it is but natural that a poor girl should sacrifice her heart to her daily bread. But here it was not so. The Marquis de Tassar was considered wealthy; and report said that his daughter had brought her husband two hundred and fifty thousand francs. Next it was imagined that the bride must be fearfully ugly, infirm, perhaps hunchback, possibly idiotic, or, at all events, of frightful temper. By no means. She had come down from Paris, and every body was amazed at her noble, quiet beauty. She had conversed with her husband's friends and charmed all of them. Was it then really a lovematch, as people called it at Sauveterre? Perhaps so. Nevertheless there was no lack of old ladies who shook their heads, and said twenty-seven years difference between husband and wife was too much, and that such a match could not possibly turn out well. All these dark forebodings came to nought. The fact was, that, for miles and miles around, there was not a happier couple to be found than the Count and Countess de Claudieuse; and two children, girls, who had appeared at an interval of four years, seemed to have cemented the happiness of the house for ever.

It is true the count retained some of the haughty reserve and imperious language which he had acquired during the time he controlled the destinies of certain important colonies. He was, moreover, naturally so passionate, that the

slightest excitement made him turn purple in the face. But the countess was as gentle and as sweet as he was violent; and as she never failed to step in between her husband and the object of his wrath, and as both he and she were naturally just, kind and generous, they were beloved by everybody. There was only one point on which the count remained rather unmanageable, namely, the game laws. He passionately fond of sport, and watched all the year round with almost painful restlessness over his preserves, to protect which he employed an extravagant number of keepers. He moreover prosecuted poachers with such energy, that people said he would rather lose a hundred napoleons than a single bird.

The count and the countess lived a retired life, and gave their whole time, he to agricultural pursuits, and she to the education of her children. They seldom gave an entertainment, and did not come to Sauveterre more than four times a year, to visit either the Demoiselles de Lavarande, or the old Baron de Chandore. Every summer, towards the end of July, they went to the seaside at Royan, where they had a chalet. When the shooting season began and the count was busy with his rifle, the countess habitually paid a visit to her relatives in Paris.

It required a storm like that of 1870 to upset so peaceful an existence. When the old ship's captain heard that the Prussians were on French soil, he felt all the instincts of a soldier and a Frenchman awake in his heart. Although of royalist opinions, he did not hesitate a moment to offer his sword to Gambetta, whom he politically detested. Having been appointed to the colonelcy of a regiment, he fought like a lion, from the first day to the last, being thrown down and trodded under foot in that fearful rout by which Chanzky's army was virtually destroyed. When the armistice was signed, he returned to Valpinson; but no one except his wife ever succeeded in making him say a word concerning the campaign. He was asked to become a candidate for the National Assembly, and he would have certainly been elected; but he refused, saying that he knew how to fight, but not how to talk.

The public prosecutor and the investigating magistrate listened but very carelessly to these details, with which they were perfectly familiar. Suddenly M. Galpin asked,

—"Are we not getting near? I look and look; but I see no trace of a fire."

"We are in a deep valley," replied the mayor. "But we are quite near now, and, at the top of that hill before us, you will see enough."

This hill, well known in the whole province, is frequently called the mountain of Sauveterre. It is so steep, and consists of such hard granite, that the engineers who laid out the great highway from Bordeaux to Nantes turned miles out of their way to avoid it. It overlooks the whole country; and, when M. Seneschal and his companions had reached the summit they could not control their excitement.

"Horresco!" murmured the public prosecutor.

The chateau itself was hidden from view by the tall trees surrounding it, but columns of fire rose above the highest branches, flooding the whole region with glaring light. The excitement extended for many miles around. The big bell, set in the short square tower of the church at Brechy, sounded the alarm in sonorous notes, and in the distant shade one heard the strange noise produced by the shells which people hereabouts ordinarily employ to summon the labourers from the fields at meal time. From all the high roads and byeways came the clatter of hurried footsteps, and peasants continually rushed by, each with a bucket in either hand.

"It is too late for help," exclaimed M. Galpin-Dave-line.

"Such a fine property!" said the mayor, "and so well managed!" And, regardless of danger, he dashed forward, down the hill; for Valpinson lies in a deep valley nearly half a mile from the river. Here all was terror, disorder, and confusion; and yet there was no lack of hands or of good-will. At the first alarm, all the people of the neighbourhood had hurried to the scene, and fresh helpers were coming every moment; still there was no one there to assume the command. The peasants were mainly engaged in saving the furniture. The boldest tried to get into the rooms, and, in a kind of rage, threw everything they could lay hold of out of the windows. Thus the courtyard was already half full of beds and mattresses, chairs, and tables, books, linen, and clothes.



“ She was holding a lamp.”

A loud shout greeted the arrival of the mayor and his companions.

"Here comes the mayor!" cried the peasants, encouraged by his presence, and all of them ready to obey him.

M. Seneschal took in the whole situation at a glance. "Yes, here I am, my friends," he said, "and I thank you all for the zeal you are showing. Now, we must try not to waste our efforts. The farm buildings and the workshops are lost: we must give them up. Let us try to save the dwelling-house. The river is not far. We must form a chain. Everybody in line,—men and women! And now for water, water! Here come the engines!"

The engines indeed came thundering up; the firemen now appeared on the scene, Captain Parenteau in command. Then only was the mayor at leisure to inquire after Count de Claudieuse.

"Master is down there," replied an old woman, pointing towards a little cottage with a thatched roof. "The doctor has had him carried there."

"Let us go and see how he is," said the mayor to his two companions. They stopped at the door of the only room of the cottage. It was a large apartment with a floor of beaten clay; the working tools and parcels of seeds hanging from the blackened beams overhead. Two old beds with twisted columns and curtains of a dirty yellow stood on one side. On that on the left hand lay a little girl, four years old, fast asleep, and rolled up in a blanket. Her sister, some two or three years older, was watching over her. On the other bed, the Count de Claudieuse was reclining, the back propped up by some pillows that had been saved from the fire. His chest was bare, and covered with blood; and a man, Dr. Seignebos, with his coat off, and his sleeves rolled up above the elbows, was bending over him, and, holding a sponge in one hand and a probe in the other, seemed to be engaged in some delicate and dangerous operation. The countess, in a light muslin dress, was standing at the foot of her husband's bed, pale, but to all appearance admirably composed and resigned. She was holding a lamp, which she moved to and fro as the doctor directed. In a corner two servant-women, sitting on a box, were crying, with their aprons turned over their heads.

At last the mayor of Sauveterre overcame his painful feelings, and entered the room. The Count de Claudieuse at once perceived him, and exclaimed, "Ah here is our good M. Seneschal. Come nearer, my friend; come nearer. You see the year 1871 is a fatal year. It will soon leave me nothing but a few handfuls of ashes of all I possessed."

"It is a great misfortune," replied the excellent mayor; "but after all, it is less than we apprehended. God be thanked, you are safe!"

"Who knows? I am suffering terribly."

The countess trembled. "Trivulce!" she whispered in a tone of entreaty. "Trivulce!"

Never did lover glance at his betrothed with more tenderness than Count Claudieuse did at his wife. "Pardon me, my dear Genevieve," he said, "pardon me, if I show any want of courage."

A nervous spasm suddenly seized him; and in a loud voice, which sounded like a trumpet, he exclaimed—"Sir! Doctor! Thunder and lightning! You are killing me!"

"I have some chloroform here," replied the physician coldly.

"I won't have any."

"Then you must make up your mind to suffer, and keep quiet now; for every motion adds to your pain." Then sponging a jet of blood which spurted out from under his knife, the doctor added, "However, you shall have a few minutes' rest now. My eyes and my hand are exhausted. I see I am no longer young."

Dr. Seignebois was indeed sixty years old. He was a small, thin man, with a bald head and a bilious complexion, carelessly dressed, and wearing a pair of large gold spectacles, which he was continually taking off, wiping and putting on again. His reputation was widespread; and people talked of wonderful cures which he had accomplished. Still he had not many friends, The working classes disliked his bitterness; the peasants, his strictness in demanding his fees; and the townspeople, his political views. There was a story current that one evening, at a public dinner, he had got up and said, "I drink to the memory of the only physician of whose pure and chaste renown I am envious,—to the memory of my countryman, Dr. Guillotin of Saintes!" Had he really proposed such

a toast? The fact is, he pretended to be a fierce radical, and was certainly the soul and the oracle of the small socialistic gatherings in the neighbourhood. People looked aghast when he began to talk of the reforms which he thought necessary; and they trembled when he proclaimed his convictions, that "the sword and the torch ought to explore the rotten foundations of society." These opinions, combined with certain utilitarian views of like eccentricity, and still stranger experiments which he openly carried on before the whole world, had led people more than once to doubt the soundness of his mind. The most charitable said, "He is an oddity." This eccentric man had naturally no great fondness for M. Seneschal, the mayor, who was a Legitimist. Neither did he think much of the public prosecutor, who in his eyes was but a useless book-worm. In addition he detested M. Galpin-Daveline. Still he bowed to all three, and, quite regardless of his patient's presence, remarked:—

"You see, gentlemen, Count Claudieuse is in a bad plight. He has been fired at with a gun loaded with small shot; and wounds made in that way are very puzzling. I trust no vital part has been injured; but I cannot answer for anything. I have often in my practice seen very small injuries, wounds caused by a small-sized shot, which, nevertheless, proved fatal, and only showed their true character twelve or fifteen hours after the accident had happened."

He would have gone on in this way for some time, if the investigating magistrate had not suddenly interrupted him, saying, "Doctor, you know I am here because a crime has been committed. The criminal has to be found out, and to be punished; hence I claim your assistance, from this moment, in the name of the law."

III.

By this single phrase M. Galpin-Daveline made himself master of the situation, and reduced not merely the doctor and the mayor, but also the public prosecutor, to an inferior position. There was nothing now to be thought of, but the crime that had been committed. In vain, however, did he try to assume a purely rigid official air, in vain did he

strive to express by his attitude that contempt for human feelings which has made justice so hateful to thousands. He could not conceal the intense satisfaction which animated his whole being.

"Well, doctor," he asked, "first of all, have you any objection to my questioning your patient?"

"It would certainly be better for him to be left alone," growled Dr. Seignebos. "I have made him suffer enough this last hour; and I shall soon have to resume extracting the small pieces of lead which have honeycombed his flesh. But if it must be—"

"It must be."

"Well, then, make haste; for the fever will set in presently."

M. Daubigeon looked very annoyed, but his colleague paid no attention. Having taken a note-book and a pencil from his pocket, he drew up close to the sick man's bed, and asked him in an undertone, "Are you strong enough, count, to answer my questions?"

"Oh, perfectly!"

"Then, pray tell me all you know of the sad events of to-night."

With the aid of his wife and Dr. Seignebos, the count raised himself on his pillows, and began thus: "Unfortunately, the little I know will be of no use in aiding justice to discover the guilty man. It may have been eleven o'clock, but I am not even quite sure of the hour; however, I had gone to bed, and just blown out my candle, when suddenly a bright light fell upon my window. I was both amazed and confused; for I was in that state of drowsiness, which if not sleep, is still very much like it. I said to myself, 'What can this be?' but I did not get up at once: I was only roused by a loud noise, like the crash of a falling wall; on hearing which I jumped out of bed, and said to myself, 'The house is on fire!' What increased my anxiety was the fact, which I at once recollected, that there were in the courtyard, and all around the house, some sixteen thousand bundles of dry wood, which had been cut last year. Half dressed, I rushed down stairs. I was very much bewildered, I confess, and could hardly succeed in opening the outer door: still I did open it at last. I had barely put my foot on the threshold, when I felt in my

right side, a little above the hip, a fierce pain, and heard at the same time, quite close to me, the report of a gun."

The magistrate interrupted him by a gesture. "Your statement, count, is certainly remarkably clear. But there is one point we must try to establish. Were you really fired at the moment you showed yourself at the door?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then the murderer must have been quite near on the watch. He must have known that the fire would bring you out; and he was lying in wait for you."

"That was and still is my impression," declared the count.

M. Galpin-Daveline turned to M. Daubigeon. "Then," said he, "the murder is the principal matter with which we have to deal; and the fire is only an aggravating circumstance—the means which the criminal employed in order to succeed the better in perpetrating his crime." Then, returning to the count, he added, "Pray go on."

"When I felt I was wounded," continued the Count de Claudieuse, "my first impulse was instinctively to rush forward to the place from which the gun seemed to have been fired at me. I had not proceeded three yards, however, when I felt the same pain once more in the shoulder and in the neck. The second wound was more serious than the first; for I lost my consciousness, my head began to swim, and I fell."

"You had not seen your assailant?"

"I beg your pardon. At the moment when I fell, I thought I saw a man rush forth from behind a pile of fagots, cross the courtyard, and disappear in the fields."

"Would you recognise him?"

"No."

"But you saw how he was dressed: you can give me some kind of description of him?"

"No, I cannot. I felt as if there was a veil before my eyes; and he passed me like a shadow."

The magistrate could hardly conceal his disappointment. "Never mind," he said "we'll find him out. But go on, sir!"

The count shook his head. "I have nothing more to say," he replied. "I had fainted, and when I recovered consciousness, some hours later, I found myself here, lying on this bed."

M. Galpin-Daveline noted down the count's answers with scrupulous exactness : when this was done he asked again, "We must return to the details of the attack, and examine them minutely. Now, however, it is important to know what happened after you fell. Who could tell us that?"

"My wife, sir."

"I thought so. The countess, no doubt, got up when you rose."

"My wife had not gone to bed."

The magistrate turned suddenly to the countess ; and at a glance he perceived that her costume was not that of a lady who had been suddenly roused from slumber by the burning of her house.

"Bertha," the count went on to state, "our youngest daughter, who is lying there on that bed, under the blanket, has the measles, and is suffering terribly. My wife was sitting up with her. Unfortunately the windows of her room look upon the garden, on the side opposite to that where the fire broke out."

"How, then, did the countess become aware of the accident?" asked the magistrate.

Without waiting for a more direct question, the countess came forward and said, "As my husband has just told you, I was sitting up with our little Bertha. I was rather tired ; for I had sat up the night before also, and I was beginning to nod, when a sudden noise aroused me. I was not quite sure whether I had really heard such a noise ; but just then a second shot was heard. I left the room more astonished than frightened. Ah, sir ! the fire had already made such headway that the staircase was as light as in broad day. I hurried downstairs. The outer door was open. I went out ; and there, some five or six yards from me, I saw, by the light of the flames, the body of my husband lying on the ground. I threw myself upon him ; but he did not even hear me : his heart had ceased to beat. I thought he was dead ; I called for help ; I was in despair."

M. Seneschal and M. Daubigeon trembled with excitement. "Well, very well !" said M. Galpin-Daveline, with an air of satisfaction,—*"very well done !"*

"You know," continued the countess, "how hard it is to rouse country-people. It seems to me I remained ever

so long, alone there, kneeling by the side of my husband. At last the brightness of the fire awakened some of the farm-hands, the work-men, and our servants. They rushed out, crying, 'Fire!' When they saw me they ran up and helped me to carry my husband to a place of safety; for the danger was increasing every minute. The fire was spreading with terrific violence, owing to a furious wind. The barns were one vast mass of fire; the outbuildings were burning, the distillery was in a blaze; and the flames escaped through the roof of the dwelling-house in various places. There was not one cool head among all the people there. I was so utterly bewildered that I forgot all about my children; and their room was already in flames, when a brave, bold fellow rushed in, and snatched them from the very jaws of death. I did not come to myself till Dr. Seignebos arrived and spoke to me words of hope. This fire will probably ruin us; but what matters that, so long as my husband and my children are safe."

During this recital the mayor, the public prosecutor, and and even the servants had hardly been able to suppress their excitement. Dr. Seignebos, however, had more than once given utterance to contemptuous impatience. He did not appreciate these preliminary steps. He shrugged his shoulders, and growled between his teeth, "Mere formalities! How petty! How childish!" After having taken off his spectacles, wiped them and replaced them twenty times, he had sat himself down before a rickety table in one corner of the room, and amused himself with arranging the fifteen or twenty shot which he had extracted from the count's wounds, in long lines or small circles. But, when the countess uttered her last words, he rose, and turning to M. Galpin, said in a curt tone, "Now, sir, I hope you will let me have my patient again."

The magistrate was not a little incensed, and with some reason surely. Frowning fiercely, he exclaimed, "I appreciate, sir, the importance of your duties; but mine are, I think, by no means less solemn nor less urgent."

"Oh!"

"Consequently, you will be pleased, sir, to grant me five minutes more."

"Ten, if it must be, sir. Only I warn you that every minute henceforth may endanger the life of my patient."

They had drawn near to each other, and stood close

together, exchanging defiant glances, which betrayed the bitterest animosity. But surely they would not quarrel at the bedside of a dying man. Still the countess seemed to fear such a thing; for she said reproachfully—"Gentlemen, I pray, gentlemen—"

Perhaps her intervention would have been of no avail, if M. Seneschal and M. Daubigeon had not stepped in, each addressing one of the two adversaries. M. Galpin-Daveline was apparently the most obstinate of the two; for, in spite of all, he turned again towards the count, and said—"I have only one more question to ask you, sir: Where and how were you standing, where and how do you think the murderer was standing, at the moment when the crime was committed?"

"Sir," replied the count, evidently with a great effort, 'I was standing, as I told you, on the threshold of my door, facing the courtyard. The murderer must have been standing some twenty yards off, on my right, behind a pile of wood."

When he had written down this answer, the magistrate turned once more to the physician, and exclaimed, "You heard what was said, sir. It is now for you to assist justice by telling us at what distance the murderer must have been when he fired."

"I don't guess riddles," replied the physician coarsely.

"Ah, have a care, sir!" said M. Galpin-Daveline. "Justice, whom I here represent, has the right and the means to enforce respect. You are a physician, sir; and your science is able to answer my question with almost mathematical accuracy.

The physician laughed, and replied, "Ah, indeed! Science has reached that point, has it? Which science? Medical jurisprudence, no doubt,—that part of our profession which is at the service of the courts, and obeys the judges' behests."

"Sir!"

But the doctor was not a man to allow himself to be defeated a second time. He went on coolly, "I know what you are going to say; there is no handbook of medical jurisprudence which does not peremptorily settle the question you ask me. I have studied these handbooks, these formidable weapons which you gentlemen of the law know so well how to handle. I know the opinions of Devergie

and Orfila, I know even what Casper and Tardieu, and a host of others teach on the subject. I am fully aware that these gentlemen claim to be able to tell you by the inch at what distance a shot has been fired. But I am not so skilful. I am only a poor country practitioner, a simple healer of diseases. And before I give an opinion which may cost some poor devil his life, innocent though he be, I must have time to reflect, to consult data, and to compare other cases in my practice."

The doctor was so evidently right in reality, if not in form, that M. Galpin-Daveline gave way. "It is merely as a matter of information that I request your opinion, sir," he observed. "Your real and carefully-considered professional opinion will, of course, be given in a special statement."

"Ah, if that is the case!"

"Pray, inform me, then unofficially, what you think of the nature of the Count de Claudieuse's wounds."

Dr. Seignebos first settled his spectacles ceremoniously on his nose, and then replied, "My impression, so far as I am now able to judge, is, that the count has stated the facts precisely as they were. I am quite ready to believe that the murderer was lying in ambush behind one of the piles of wood, and at the distance which has been mentioned. I am able to affirm, moreover, that the two shots were fired at different distances,—one much nearer than the other. The proof of it lies in the nature of the wounds, one of which, near the hip, may be scientifically called—"

"But we know at what distance a ball is spent," broke in M. Seneschal, whom the doctor's dogmatic tone began to annoy.

"Ah, do we know that, indeed? You know it, M. Seneschal? Well, I declare I don't. To be sure, I bear in mind, what you seem to forget, that we have no longer, as in former days, only three or four kinds of guns. Have you thought of the immense variety of firearms, French and English, American and German, which are now-a-days found in everybody's hands? Do you not see, you who have been a lawyer and a magistrate, that the whole legal question will be based upon this great and all-important point?" So saying, the physician took up his instruments, resolved to give no other answer, and he was about to resume work, when fearful cries were heard without. The

magistrates, the mayor, and the countess herself rushed at once to the door. These cries were unfortunately not uttered without cause. The roof of the main building had just fallen in, burying under its ruins the poor drummer who had beaten the alarm a few hours ago, together with one of the firemen, a highly-esteemed Sauveterre carpenter, father of five children.

Captain Parenteau seemed to be maddened by this disaster; and all vied with each other in efforts to rescue the poor fellows, whose shrieks of despair rose high above the crash of the falling timbers. But all endeavours proved unavailing. One of the gendarmes and a farmer, who had nearly succeeded in reaching the sufferers, barely escaped being burnt themselves, and were only rescued after having been dangerously injured. Then only did the spectators seem fully aware of the abominable crime committed by the incendiary; and, as the clouds of smoke and columns of fire rose high into the air, fierce cries of vengeance broke forth: "Death to the incendiary! Death!"

At this moment M. Seneschal was inspired with a sudden thought. He knew well enough how cautious all peasants are as a rule, and how difficult it is to make them tell the whole of what they know. He climbed, therefore, upon a heap of fallen beams, and exclaimed in a clear loud voice,—"Yes, my friends, you are right: death to the incendiary! Yes, the unfortunate victims of the basest of crimes must be avenged. We must find out the incendiary; we must! You want us to do so, don't you? Well, it depends only on you. There must be some one among you who knows something about this matter. Let him come forward and tell us what he has seen or heard. Remember, that the smallest trifle may be a clue to the crime. You would be as bad as the incendiary himself, if you tried to screen him. Just think it over, consult one another, my friends."

A murmur ran through the crowd; then suddenly a voice exclaimed, "There is one person who can tell us something."

"Who?"

"Cocoleu. He was there from the beginning. It was he who went and brought the children out of their room. What has become of him?—Cocoleu, Cocoleu!"

The excitement became intense, and eager questions

were exchanged as to the possible whereabouts of the individual in question. For many years he had been well known to everybody present. There was not one among them who had not given him a piece of bread, or a bowl of soup, when he was hungry; not one of them who had ever refused him a night's rest on the straw in his barn, when it was raining or freezing, and the poor fellow wanted a shelter. For Cocoléu was one of those unfortunate beings who labour under a grievous physical or moral deformity.

Some twenty years previously a wealthy land-owner of Brechy had sent to the nearest town for half a dozen painters, who remained painting and decorating his newly-built house during well-nigh the entire summer. One of these men seduced a girl of the neighbourhood, whom he bewitched by his long white blouse, his handsome brown moustache, his good spirits, gay songs, and flattering speeches. But, when the work was done, the tempter departed with the others, without thinking any more of the poor girl than of the last cigar he had smoked. And yet she was expecting a child. When she could no longer conceal her condition, she was turned out of the house in which she was employed; and her parents, scarcely able to support themselves, drove her away without mercy. Overcome with grief, shame, and remorse, poor Colette wandered from farm to farm, begging her bread, insulted, laughed at, beaten even at times. Thus it came about, that in a dark wood, one dismal winter evening, she gave life to a little boy. No one ever understood how mother and child managed to survive. Still both lived; and for many a year they were seen in and around Sauveterre, clad in rags, and living upon the scanty generosity of the peasants.

At length the mother died, unsuccoured as she had lived. Her body was found one morning in a ditch by the wayside.

The child remained alone. He was then eight years old, and both strong and tall for his age. A farmer took pity on him, and led him home. But the little wretch was not fit for anything; he could not even keep his master's cows. During his mother's lifetime, his silence, his wild looks, and his savage appearance, had been attributed to his wretched mode of life. But now it was found out

that his intellect had never been aroused. He was an idiot, and, besides, subject to one of those terrible nervous affections which at times shake the whole body, and disfigure the face by the violence of uncontrollable convulsions. He was not a deaf-mute; but he could only stammer with intense difficulty a few disjointed syllables. Sometimes the country people would say to him,—“Tell us your name, and you shall have a sou.”

But it took him five minutes' hard work and a thousand painful contortions to articulate his mother's name. “Co-co-co-lette.” Hence came his name Cocoleu. When it had been ascertained that he was utterly unable to do anything, people ceased to interest themselves in his behalf. In consequence, he was abandoned to his former vagabond life.

It was about this time that Dr. Seignebos met him one day on the high road. This excellent man had, among other extraordinary notions, the conviction that idiocy is nothing more than a defective state of the brains, which may be remedied by the administration of certain well-known substances, such as phosphorus, for instance. He lost no time in seizing upon this admirable opportunity to test his theory. Cocoleu was sent for, and installed in his house. He subjected him to a treatment which he kept secret; and only a local druggist, who was also well known for his extraordinary notions, knew exactly what happened. At the end of eighteen months, Cocoleu had lost flesh considerably: he talked, perhaps, a little more fluently, but his intellect had not been perceptibly improved. Dr. Seignebos was discouraged. He made up a parcel of things which he had given to his patient, put it into his hands, pushed him out of his door, and told him never to come back again. The doctor had rendered Cocoleu a sad service. The poor idiot was no longer accustomed to privation: he had forgotten how to beg his way from door to door; and he would surely have perished, if his good fortune had not led him to the Chateau of Valpinson.

The Count de Claudieuse and his wife were touched by his wretchedness, and determined to take charge of him. They gave him a room and a bed in one of the farm buildings; but they could never induce him to stay there. He was by nature a vagabond, and could not control his vaga-

bond instincts. At winter time the frost and snow kept him indoors for a little while ; but, as soon as the first leaves came out, he went wandering again through forest and field, remaining absent often for weeks together. At last, however, some instinct seemed aroused in him, resembling that of a domesticated animal. His attachment to the countess was like that of a dog, down to the capers and cries with which he greeted her whenever they met. Often, when she went out, he would accompany her, running and frolicking just like a dog. He was also very fond of the little girls, and seemed to resent being kept away from them as he was at times ; for people were afraid his nervous attacks might affect the children. With time he had also become capable of performing some simple services. He could be intrusted with easy messages, water the flowers, summon a servant, or even carry a letter to the post-office at Brechy. His progress in this respect was so marked, that some of the more cunning peasants began to suspect that Cocoleu was not so "innocent," after all, as he looked, and that he was cleverly playing the fool in order to enjoy life easily.

Such was the individual whom it was asserted knew something of the cause of the catastrophe which had visited Valpinson and its owners. "We have him at last," cried several voices suddenly. "Here he is; here he is!" The crowd made way promptly ; and almost immediately a young man appeared, led or pushed forward by several persons. Cocoleu's clothes, all in disorder, showed clearly that he had opposed a stout resistance to his captors. He was a youth of about eighteen, very tall, quite beardless, excessively thin, and so loosely jointed, that he looked like a hunchback. A mass of reddish hair fell over his low retreating forehead. His small eyes, his enormous mouth bristling with sharp teeth, his broad flat nose, and immense ears gave him a strange, idiotic, brutish air.

"What must we do with him?" asked the peasants of the mayor.

"Take him before the magistrate, my friends," replied M. Seneschal,— "down there in that cottage, where you carried the count."

"And we'll make him talk," threatened his captors. "Come ! Go on, quick !"

IV.

BOTH M. Galpin-Daveline and the doctor seemingly considered that professional dignity required them to retain an air of perfect indifference. Hence they did not evince the least apparent curiosity as to what was going on out of doors. Dr. Seignebos quietly resumed his operation ; and, as coolly as if he had been in his own rooms at home, proceeded to wash the sponge which he had just used, and to wipe his instruments. The magistrate, on the other hand, stood in the centre of the room, his arms crossed, and his eyes apparently fixed upon the infinite. It may be he was thinking of his star, which had at last brought him a famous criminal case, such as he had ardently longed for many a year.

The Count de Claudieuse, however, was very far from sharing this reserve. He tossed about on his bed ; and as soon as the mayor and M. Daubigeon reappeared, looking quite upset, he exclaimed,—“What does that uproar mean ?”

Then when he had heard of the calamity, he added,—“Great God ! And I was complaining of my losses. Two men killed ! That is a real misfortune. Poor fellows ! Bolton was hardly thirty years old ; Guillebault, a father of a family, will leave five children quite penniless.”

The countess heard these last words. “As long as we have a mouthful of bread,” she said, in a voice full of deep emotion, “neither Bolton’s mother, nor Guillebault’s children, shall ever know what want is.”

She had not time to speak further ; for at that moment the peasants crowded into the room, pushing the prisoner before them. “Where is the investigating magistrate ?” they asked. “Here is a witness !”

“What, Cocoleu !” exclaimed the count.

“Yes, he knows something : he said so himself. We want him to tell it to the magistrate. We want the incendiary to be caught.”

Dr. Seignebos had frowned fiercely. He execrated Cocoleu, whose sight recalled to him that great experimental failure which the good people of Sauveterre were not likely soon to forget. “You do not really mean to examine him ?” he asked, turning to M. Galpin-Daveline.

"Why not?" answered the magistrate dryly.

"Because he is an imbecile, sir, an idiot. Because he cannot possibly understand your questions, or the importance of his answers."

"He may give us a valuable hint, nevertheless."

"He? A man who has no sense? You don't really think so. The law cannot attach any importance to the evidence of a fool."

M. Galpin betrayed his impatience by an increase of stiffness, as he replied,—*"I know my duty, sir."*

"And I," replied the physician,—*"I also know what I have to do. You have summoned me to assist you in this investigation. I obey; and I declare officially, that the mental condition of this unfortunate man makes his evidence utterly worthless. I appeal to the public prosecutor."*

He had hoped for a word of encouragement from M. Daubigeon; but nothing came. Accordingly Dr. Seigne-bos continued: *"Take care, sir, or you may get yourself into trouble. What would you do if this poor fellow should make a formal charge against any one? Could you attach any weight to his word?"*

One of the peasants who were listening with open mouths, hereupon exclaimed—*"Oh! Cocoleu is not so innocent as he looks."*

"He can say very well what he wants to say, the scamp!" added another.

"At all events, I am indebted to him for the life of my children," said the count gently. "He thought of them when I was unconscious, and when no one else remembered them.—Come, Cocoleu, come nearer, my friend, don't be afraid: there is no one here to hurt you."

There was need for the count to use such kind words: for Cocoleu was thoroughly terrified by the brutal treatment he had experienced, and was trembling in all his limbs. "I am—not—a—afraid," he stammered out.

"Once more I protest," said the physician. He had found out that he was alone in his opinion. Indeed, the Count de Claudieuse came to his assistance, saying,—*"I really think it might be dangerous to question Cocoleu."*

But the magistrate was master of the situation, fully conscious of all the powers conferred upon him by the law. "I must beg, gentlemen," he said in a tone which did not

allow of any reply,—“I must beg to be permitted to act in my own way.” And then sitting down, he asked Cocoleu,—“Come, my boy, listen to me, and try to understand what I say. Do you know what has happened at Valpinson?”

“Fire,” replied the idiot.

“Yes, my friend, fire, which burns down the house of your benefactor,—fire, which has killed two good men. But that is not all: they have tried to murder the count. Do you see him there in his bed, wounded, and covered with blood? Do you see the countess, how she suffers?”

Did Cocoleu understand? At all events his distorted features betrayed nothing of what might be going on within him.

“What nonsense!” growled the doctor, “what obstinacy! what folly!”

M. Galpin-Daveline overheard these ejaculations, and angrily remarked,—“Sir, do not force me to remind you that I have, not far from here, men whose duty it is to see that my authority is respected.” Then, turning again to the poor idiot, he went on,—“All these misfortunes are the work of a vile incendiary. You hate him, don’t you? you detest him, the rascal!”

“Yes,” said Cocoleu.

“You want him to be punished, don’t you?”

“Yes, yes!”

“Well, then, you must help me to find him out, so that the gendarmes may catch him and put him in jail. You know who it is; you have told these people—”

He paused for a moment, then, as Cocoleu kept silent, he asked,—“But, now I think of it, who has this poor fellow talked to?”

Not one of the peasants could tell. They inquired; but no answer came. Perhaps Cocoleu had never said what he was reported to have said.

“The fact is,” remarked one of the Valpinson tenants, “that the poor devil, so to say, never sleeps, and that he is roaming about all night around the house and the farm-buildings.”

This was a new light for M. Galpin: suddenly changing the form of his interrogatory, he asked Cocoleu,—“Where did you spend the night?”

“In—in—the—court—yard.”

"Were you asleep when the fire broke out?"

"No."

"Did you see it commence?"

"Yes."

"How did it commence?"

The idiot looked fixedly at the Countess Claudieuse with the timid and abject expression of a dog trying to read something in his master's eyes.

"Tell us, my friend," said the countess gently,—*"tell us."*

A flash of intelligence shone in Cocoleu's eyes. *"They—they set it on fire,"* he stammered.

"On purpose?"

"Yes."

"Who?"

"A gentleman."

There was not a person present at this extraordinary scene who did not anxiously hold his breath as the last answer came. The doctor alone kept cool, and exclaimed—*"Such an examination is sheer folly!"*

But the magistrate did not seem to hear his words. Turning to Cocoleu, he asked in a deeply-agitated tone of voice: *"Did you see the gentleman?"*

"Yes."

"Do you know who he is?"

"Very—very—well."

"What is his name?"

"Oh yes!"

"What is his name? tell us."

Cocoleu's features betrayed a fearful anguish of mind. He hesitated, but finally making a violent effort, he answered,—*"Bois—Bois—Boiscoran!"*

The name was received with murmurs of indignation and incredulous laughter. There was not a shadow of doubt or suspicion. The peasants murmured, *"M. de Boiscoran an incendiary! Who does he think will believe that story?"*

"It is absurd!" said Count Claudieuse.

"Nonsense!" repeated the mayor and his friend.

Dr. Seignebos had taken off his spectacles, and was wiping them with an air of intense satisfaction.

"What did I tell you?" he exclaimed. *"But the in*

investigating magistrate did not condescend to attach any importance to my suggestions."

The magistrate in question was by far the most excited man of all present. He had turned excessively pale, and was visibly making the greatest efforts to preserve his equanimity. The public prosecutor leaned towards him, and whispered, "If I were in your place, I would stop here, and consider the answer as not given."

But M. Galpin-Daveline was one of those men so blinded by self-conceit that they would rather be cut to pieces than admit they have been mistaken. He answered, "I shall go on."

Then turning once more to Cocoleu, in the midst of so deep a silence that the buzzing of a fly would have been distinctly heard, he asked, "Do you know, my boy, what you say? Do you know that you are accusing a man of a horrible crime?"

Whether Cocoleu understood, or not, he was evidently deeply agitated. Big drops of perspiration rolled slowly down his forehead, while nervous shocks agitated his limbs, and convulsed his features. "I, I—am—telling the—truth!" he said at last.

"It was M. de Boiscoran who set Valpinson on fire?"

"Yes."

"How did he do it?"

Cocoleu's restless eyes wandered incessantly from the count, who looked indignant, to the countess, who seemed to listen with painful surprise. The magistrate repeated,—"Speak!"

After another moment's hesitation, the idiot began to explain what he had seen; and it took him many minutes to state, amid countless contortions, and painful efforts to speak, that he had perceived M. de Boiscoran pull out some papers from his pocket, light them with a match, put them under a rick of straw near by, and push the burning mass towards two enormous piles of wood which were in close contact with a vat full of spirits.

"This is sheer nonsense!" cried the doctor, thus giving words to what they all seemed to feel.

But M. Galpin-Daveline had mastered his excitement. "At the first sign of applause or of displeasure," said he, "I shall send for the gendarmes, and have the room cleared." Then turning once more to Cocoleu, he added, "Since you

saw M. de Boiscoran so distinctly, tell us how he was dressed."

"He had light trousers on," replied the idiot, still stammering most painfully, "a dark-brown shooting-jacket, and a big straw hat. His trousers were stuffed into his boots."

Two or three peasants looked at each other, as if they had at last hit upon a suspicious fact. The costume which Cocoleu had so accurately described was well known to them all.

"And when he had kindled the fire," said the magistrate again, "what did he do next?"

"He hid behind the woodpile."

"And then?"

"He loaded his gun, and, when master came out, he fired."

Count Claudieuse was so indignant that he forgot the pain which his wounds caused him, and raised himself on his bed. "It is monstrous," he exclaimed, "to allow an idiot to charge an honourable man with such a crime! If he really saw M. de Boiscoran set the house on fire, and hide himself in order to murder me, why did he not come and warn me?"

M. Galpin repeated the question submissively, to the great amazement of the mayor and M. Daubigeon. "Why did you not give warning?" he asked Cocoleu.

But the efforts which the idiot had made during the last half-hour had exhausted his little strength. He broke out into stupid laughter; and almost instantly one of his fearful attacks overcame him: he fell down yelling, and had to be carried away.

The magistrate had risen, pale and deeply excited, but evidently meditating on what was to be done next. The public prosecutor asked him in an undertone what he was going to do; whereupon he replied: "I shall pursue this investigation."

"What?"

"Can I act otherwise in my position? God is my witness that I tried my best, by urging this poor idiot, to prove the absurdity of his accusation. But the result has disappointed me."

"And now?"

"Now I can no longer hesitate. There have been ten witnesses present at the examination. My honour is at

stake. I must establish either the guilt or the innocence of the man whom Cocoleu accuses." Immediately, walking up to the count's bed, he asked, "Will you have the kindness to tell me the nature of your acquaintance with M. de Boiscoran?"

Surprise and indignation caused the wounded man to blush deeply. "Can it be possible, sir, that you believe the words of that idiot?"

"I believe nothing," answered the magistrate. "My duty is to unravel the truth; and I mean to do it."

"The doctor has told you what the state of Cocoleu's mind is?"

"Count, I beg you will answer my question."

The Count de Claudieuse looked angry; still he replied promptly—"My acquaintance with M. de Boiscoran is neither good nor bad. We do not frequent each other's society."

"It is reported, I have heard so myself, that you are on bad terms."

"On no terms at all. I never leave Valpinson, and M. de Boiscoran spends nine months of the year in Paris. He has never called at my house, and I have never been in his."

"You have been overheard speaking of him in unmeasured terms."

"That may be. We are neither of the same age, nor have we the same tastes or the same opinions. He is young; I am old. He likes Paris and fashionable society. I am fond of solitude and hunting. I am a Legitimist; he used to be an Orleanist, and now he is a Republican. I believe that the descendant of our ancient kings alone can save the country: and he is convinced that the happiness of France is only possible under a Republic. But two men may be enemies and yet esteem each other. M. de Boiscoran is an honourable man; he did his duty bravely during the war, he fought well, and was wounded."

M. Galpin-Daveline noted down these answers with extreme care. When he had done so, he continued,—“The question is not one of political opinions only. You, have had personal difficulties with M. de Boiscoran.”

“Of no importance.”

“I beg pardon: you have been at law.”

“Our estates adjoin each other. There is an unlucky

brook between us, which is a source of constant trouble."

M. Galpin-Daveline shook his head, and added,—“ These are not the only difficulties you have had with each other. Everybody knows that you have had violent altercations together.”

The Count de Claudieuse seemed to be in great distress. “ It is true,” he answered, “ we have used hard words. M. de Boiscoran had two wretched dogs, that were continually escaping from his kennels, and breaking into my estate. You can not imagine how much game they destroyed.”

“ Exactly. And one day you met M. de Boiscoran and warned him that you would shoot his dogs.”

“ I must confess I was furious. But I was wrong, a thousand times wrong ; I did threaten—”

“ That is it. You were both of you armed. You threatened one another : he actually aimed at you. Don't deny it. A number of persons saw it ; and I know it for a fact. He told me so himself.”

V.

EVERY one in the district was acquainted with the fearful disease from which poor Cocoleu was suffering ; and everybody believed that it was perfectly useless to try and help him. The two men who had carried him out merely laid him, therefore, on a pile of wet straw, and then returned to see and hear what was going on. It must be said, in justice to the several hundred peasants who were crowding around the smoking ruins of Valpinson, that they began by shrugging their shoulders in utter disbelief when they heard that M. de Boiscoran was accused of the crime. Unfortunately, first impulses, which are apt to be good impulses, do not last long. One of those idle, envious, besotted good-for-nothings, who are found in every community, in the country as well as the town, suddenly cried out,—“ And after all, why not ? ”

These few words at once opened a door to all kinds of venturesome guesses. Everybody had heard something about the quarrel between the Count de Claudieuse and M. de Boiscoran. It was well known, moreover, that provocation had always come from the count, and that his young neighbour had invariably given way in the end. But

might not M. de Boiscoran, impatient at last, have resorted to this means of avenging himself on a man whom they all thought he must needs hate, and whom he probably feared at the same time? The next step was, of course, to find a justification for a theory, and the opportunity was not lacking. Two men and a woman soon declared aloud that they could astonish the world if they only chose to talk. They were urged to tell what they knew; and, of course, they refused. But they had said too much already. Willing or unwilling, they were led to the cottage, where M. Galpin-Daveline was then examining the Count de Claudieuse. The excited crowd made such a disturbance, that M. Seneschal, trembling at the idea of a new accident, rushed to the door. "What is it now?" he asked.

"More witnesses," replied the peasants. "Here are some more witnesses."

The mayor turned round, and after exchanging glances with M. Daubigeon, he said to the investigating magistrate, "They are bringing you more witnesses, sir."

No doubt M. Galpin-Daveline was little pleased at the interruption; but he was sufficiently well acquainted with the folks of the district, to know that, unless he took them at the moment when they were willing to talk, he might never be able to get anything out of them.

"We shall return some other time to our conversation," he said to the Count de Claudieuse. Then, replying to M. Seneschal, he added, "Let the witnesses come in, but only one by one."

The first who entered was the only son of a well-to-do farmer of Brechy, named Ribot. He was a young fellow of about twenty-five, broad shouldered, with a very small head, a low brow, and formidable crimson ears. Still for twenty miles around, he was reputed to be an irresistible beau,—a reputation of which he was very proud. After having asked him his name, and his age, M. Galpin-Daveline inquired, "Well, what is it that you want?"

The young man straightened himself, and with a marvelously conceited air, which set all the peasants a-laughing, answered, "I was out to-night on some little private business of my own. I had to go beyond the chateau of Boiscoran. Somebody was waiting for me, and I was behind time: so I cut right across the marshes. I knew the rains of the last days would have filled all the ditches; but when

a man is out on such important business as mine, his legs don't fail him—”

“Spare us those tedious details,” said the magistrate coldly.

The village Lovelace looked more surprised than offended by the interruption. “As you like, sir,” said he. “Well, it was about eight o'clock, or a very little more, and it was growing dark, when I reached the Seille swamps. They were overflowing; and the water was two inches above the stonework of the canal. I was wondering how to get across without spoiling my clothes, when I saw M. de Boiscoran coming towards me from the other side.”

“Are you quite sure it was he?”

“Why, I should think so! I talked to him. But stop, he was not afraid of getting wet. Without much ado, he rolled up his trousers, stuffed them into the tops of his tall boots, and went right through. Just then he saw me, and seemed surprised. I was as much so as he was. ‘Why, is it you, sir?’ I said. He replied, ‘Yes: I have to see somebody at Brechy.’ ‘You have chosen a queer way,’ said I. He laughed. ‘I did not know the swamps had overflowed,’ he answered, ‘and I thought I would shoot some waterfowl on the way.’ As he said this, he showed me his gun. At that moment I had nothing to say; but now, when I think it over, it looks rather queer.”

M. Galpin had written down this statement as fast as it was given. He next asked, “How was M. de Boiscoran dressed?”

“He had grayish trousers on, a shooting-jacket of brown velveteen, and a broad-brimmed panama hat.”

The count and the countess looked most distressed, while the mayor and M. Daubigeon appeared equally troubled. One circumstance in Ribot's evidence seemed to have struck them with peculiar force,—the fact that he had seen M. de Boiscoran tuck his trousers inside his boots.

“You can go,” said M. Galpin to the young man. “Let another witness come in.”

An old man of bad reputation who lived alone in an old hut two miles from Valpinson now entered. He was called Father Gaudry. Unlike young Ribot, who had shown great assurance, the new comer stood humble and cringing in his dirty, ill-smelling rags. After having

given his name, he said,—“It might have been eleven o’clock at night, and I was going through the forest of Rochepommier, along one of the little by-paths—”

“You were stealing wood!” said the magistrate sternly.

“Great God, what an idea!” cried the old man, raising his hands to heaven. “How can you say such a thing! I steal wood! No, my dear sir, I was very quietly going to sleep in the forest, so as to be up with daylight, to gather mushrooms to sell at Sauveterre. Well, I was trotting along, when, all of a sudden, I heard footsteps behind me. Naturally, I was frightened.”

“Because you were stealing.”

“Oh, no, my good sir; only at night you understand. . . . Well, I hid behind a tree; and almost at the same moment I saw M. de Boiscoran pass by. I recognised him perfectly in spite of the dark; for he seemed to be in a great rage, talking aloud to himself, swearing, gesticulating and tearing handfuls of leaves from the trees.”

“Did he have a gun?”

“Yes, my good sir; for that was the very thing that frightened me so. I thought at first he was a keeper.”

The third and last witness proved to be an old woman, Madame Courtois, whose little farm lay on the other side of the Rochepommier. After some little hesitation she spoke as follows; “I do not know much; but I will tell you all I do know. As we expected to have a house full of workmen a few days hence, and as I had to bake bread to-morrow, I set off with my ass to the mill on the mountain to fetch some flour. The miller had not any ready; but he told me if I could wait, he would let me have some; and so I stayed to supper. About ten o’clock they gave me a sack full of flour. The boys put it on the donkey, and I came away. It was, perhaps, eleven o’clock, when, just at the edge of the forest of Rochepommier, my ass stumbled, and the sack fell off. I had a great deal of trouble, for I was not strong enough to lift it alone, when I saw a man come out of the wood close by. I called to him, and he came. It was M. de Boiscoran. I asked him to help me, and at once, without losing a moment, he puts his gun down, lifts the bag from the ground and puts it on my ass. I thank him. He says, ‘Welcome,’ and—that is all.”

All this time the mayor had been standing by the door

of the cottage, barring the entrance to the eager inquisitive crowd outside. When Madame Courtois retired, quite bewildered by her own words, and already regretting what she had said, M. Seneschal inquired, "Is there any one else who knows anything?"

As nobody appeared, he closed the door, saying curtly, "Well, then, you can go home now, my friends. Let the law have free course."

The law, represented by the investigating magistrate, was a prey at that moment to the most cruel perplexity. M. Galpin-Daveline was utterly overcome by consternation. He sat at the little table, on which he had been writing, his head resting on his hands, thinking, apparently, how he could find a way out of this labyrinth. All of a sudden he rose, and forgetting for a moment his customary rigidity, letting his mask of icy impassiveness drop from his face, he ejaculated, "Well?" as if in his despair he had hoped for some help or advice. "Well?" he asked again.

No answer came. All the others were as much bewildered as he was. They all tried to shake off the overwhelming impression made by this accumulation of evidence; but in vain. At last, after a moment's silence, the magistrate said with strange bitterness, "You see, gentlemen, I was right in examining Cocoleu. Oh! don't attempt to deny it: you share my doubts and my suspicions, I see it. Is there one among you who would dare assert that the terrible excitement of this poor fellow has not restored to him for a time the use of his reason! When he told you that he had witnessed the crime, and when he gave the name of the criminal, you looked incredulous. But then other witnesses came, and their united evidence corresponding without a missing link, constitutes a terrible presumption."

He became animated again. Professional habits stronger than everything else, obtained once more the mastery. "M. de Boiscoran was at Valpinson to-night: that is clearly established. Well, how did he get here? By concealing himself. Between his own house and Valpinson there are two public roads—one by Brechy, and another around the swamps. Does M. de Boiscoran take either of the two? No. He cuts straight across the marshes, at the risk of sinking in, or of getting wet from

head to foot. On his return he chooses, in spite of the darkness, the forest of Rochemommier, unmindful of the risk he runs of losing his way, and of wandering about till daybreak. What was he doing this for? Evidently, in order not to be seen. And, in fact, whom does he meet?—a loose fellow, Ribot, who is himself in hiding on account of some love intrigue; a wood-stealer, Gaudry, whose only anxiety is to avoid the gendarmes; an old woman, finally Madame Courtois, who has been belated by an accident. All his precautions were well chosen; but Providence was watching.”

“O Providence!” growled Dr. Seignebos,—“Providence!”

M. Galpin-Daveline did not even hear the interruption. Speaking faster and faster, he continued, “Would it at least be possible to plead on M. de Boiscoran’s behalf a difference in time? No. At what time was he seen coming in this direction? At nightfall. ‘It was half-past eight,’ says Ribot, ‘when M. de Boiscoran crossed the canal at the Seille swamps.’ He might, therefore, have easily reached Valpinson at half-past nine. At that hour the crime had not yet been committed. When was he seen returning home? Gaudry and the woman Courtois have told you the hour,—after eleven o’clock. At that time the Count de Claudieuse had been shot at and Valpinson was on fire. Do we know anything of M. de Boiscoran’s temper at that time? Yes, we do. When he came this way he was quite cool. He is very much surprised at meeting Ribot; but he explains to him very fully how he happens to be going that way, and also why he has a gun. He says he is on his way to meet somebody at Brechy, and he thought he would shoot some waterfowl. Is that admissible? Is it even likely? However, let us look at him on his way back. Gaudry says he was walking very fast: he seemed to be furious, and was pulling handfuls of leaves from the branches. What does Madame Courtois say? Nothing. When she calls him, he does not venture to run; that would have been a confession, but he is in a great hurry to help her. And then! His way for a quarter of an hour is the same as the woman’s: does he keep her company? No. He leaves her hastily. He goes ahead, and hurries home; for he thinks the Count de Claudieuse is dead: he knows Val-

pinson is in flames ; and he fears he will hear the bells ring, and see the fire raging."

M. Galpin-Daveline had evidently been carried away by the rapidity of events. Since the first question addressed to Cocoleu, up to the present moment, he had not had time to consider. His proceedings had moreover been public, hence he naturally felt tempted to cast aside his habitual magisterial reserve and to explain his line of conduct.

"And you call this a legal inquiry?" asked Dr. Seignebo, who had taken off his spectacles, and was wiping them furiously. "An inquiry founded upon what?" he went on with such vehemence that no one dared interrupt him,—“founded upon the evidence of an unfortunate creature, whom I, a physician, testify to be not responsible for what he says. Reason does not go out and become lighted again, like the gas in a street-lamp. A man is an idiot, or he is not an idiot. He has always been one and he always will be one. But you say, the other statements are conclusive. Say, rather, that you think they are. Why? Because you are prejudiced by Cocoleu's accusation. But for it, you would never have troubled yourselves about what M. de Boiscoran did, or about what he didn't do. He walked about the whole evening. He has a right to do so. He crossed the marshes. He went through the woods. Why shouldn't he? People meet him. Is not that quite natural? But no: an idiot accuses him, and forthwith all he does looks suspicious. He talks. It is the insolence of a hardened criminal. He is silent. It is the remorse of a guilty man trembling with fear. Instead of naming M. de Boiscoran, Cocoleu might just as well have named me, Dr. Seignebo. At once, all my doings would have appeared suspicious; and I am quite sure a thousand evidences of my guilt would have been discovered. It would have been an easy matter. Are not my opinions more radical even than those of M. de Boiscoran? For there is the key to the whole matter M. de Boiscoran is a Republican; M. de Boiscoran acknowledges no sovereignty but that of the people—"

"Doctor," broke in the public prosecutor, "you speak without reflection."

"I don't, I assure you—"

But he was once more interrupted, and this time by the

Count de Claudieuse, who remarked, "For my part, I admit all the arguments brought forward by the magistrate. But above all probabilities, I place a fact,—the character of the accused. M. de Boiscoran is a man of honour. He is incapable of committing such a mean and odious crime."

The others assented; M. Seneschal adding, "And I, I will tell you another thing. What could be the purpose of such a crime? Ah! if M. de Boiscoran had nothing to lose! But do you know among your friends a happier man than he is?—young, handsome, in excellent health, immensely wealthy, esteemed and popular with everybody. Finally, there is another fact, which is still a family secret, but which I may tell you, and which will remove at once all suspicions,—M. de Boiscoran is desperately in love with Mademoiselle Denise de Chandore. She returns his love; and only the day before yesterday the wedding was fixed for the 20th of next month."

In the meantime the hours had sped on. Half-past four struck at the clock of Brechy church. Day was breaking; and the light of the lamps grew pale. At last the morning mists evaporated, and an early sun-ray fell upon the window-panes. But no one noticed it: all these men gathered around the bed of the wounded man were too deeply excited. M. Galpin-Daveline had listened to the objections made by the others, without a word or a gesture. He had so far recovered his self-control, that it was difficult to see what impressions they had made upon his mind. At last, shaking his head gravely, he said,—

"More than you, gentlemen, I feel a desire to believe M. de Boiscoran innocent. M. Daubigeon, who knows what I mean, will tell you so. In my heart I pleaded his cause. But I am the representative of the law; and my duty is above my affections. Does it depend on me to set aside Cocoléu's accusation, however stupid, however absurd, it may be? Can I undo the three statements made by the witnesses, and confirming so strongly the suspicions aroused by the first charge?"

The Count de Claudieuse seemed distressed beyond expression. At last he said, "The worst thing about it is that M. de Boiscoran thinks I am his enemy. I should not wonder if he went and imagined that these charges and vile suspicions have been suggested by my wife or by

myself. If I could only get up! At least let M. de Boiscoran know distinctly that I am ready to answer for him, as I would answer for myself. Cocoleu, the wretched idiot! Ah, Genevieve, my darling wife! why did you induce him to talk? If you had not insisted, he would have kept silent for ever."

The countess was giving way at last to the anxieties of this terrible night. At first she had been supported by that exaltation which is apt to follow a great crisis; but now prostration had come in its turn. She had sunk upon a stool, near the bed on which her two daughters were lying; and, her head hid in the pillow, she seemed to sleep. But she was not slumbering. When her husband reproached her thus, she rose, pale, with swollen eyes and distorted features, and cried in a piercing voice,—“What! They have tried to kill my Trivulce; our children have been near unto death in the flames; and I should have allowed any means to be unused by which the guilty one might be found out? No! I have only done what it was my duty to do. Whatever may come of it, I regret nothing.”

“But, Genevieve, M. de Boiscoran is not guilty: he can not possibly be guilty. How could a man who has the happiness of being loved by Denise de Chandore, whose wedding day is so nigh,—how could he devise such a hideous crime?”

“Let him prove his innocence,” replied the countess mercilessly.

The doctor pouted in the most impertinent manner. “There is a woman’s logic for you,” he murmured.

“Certainly,” said M. Seneschal, “M. de Boiscoran’s innocence will be promptly established. Nevertheless, suspicion will remain. And our people are so constituted, that this suspicion will overshadow his whole life. Twenty years hence, they will meet him, and think, “Ah, there’s the man who set Valpinson on fire!”

This time it was not M. Galpin who replied, but the public prosecutor who said sadly, “I cannot share your views; but that does not matter. After what has passed, our friend M. Galpin cannot retrace his steps: his own duty and the interests of the accused make that impossible. What would all these people, who have heard Cocoleu’s deposition, and the evidence given by the wit

nesses, say, if the inquiry were stopped? They would certainly consider M. de Boiscoran was guilty, and attribute his not being prosecuted to the fact that he is rich and of noble birth. Upon my honour I believe him to be innocent. But precisely because this is my conviction, I maintain that his innocence must be clearly established. No doubt he will enable us to do so. When he met Ribot, he told him he was on his way to see somebody at Brechy."

"But suppose he never went there?" objected M. Seneschal. "Suppose he did not see anybody there? Suppose it was only a pretext to satisfy Ribot's impertinent curiosity?"

"Well, then, he would only have to tell the truth in court. And look! here's an important point which in itself almost exculpates M. de Boiscoran. Would he not have loaded his gun with ball, if he had really thought of murdering the count? whereas we know it was loaded with nothing but small-shot."

"And he would never have missed me at ten yards' distance," said the count.

At this moment somebody was heard knocking furiously at the door. "Come in!" cried M. Seneschal. The door opened, and three peasants appeared, looking bewildered, but evidently pleased.

"We have just found something curious," said one of them.

"What is it?" asked M. Galpin-Daveline.

"Pitard says it is a cartridge-case."

The Count de Claudieuse raised himself on his pillows, and said eagerly,—“Let me see it. During these last days I have fired several times near the house to frighten away the birds that eat our fruit. I want to see if the case is one of mine.”

The peasant gave it to him. It was a very thin lead case like those of the cartridges used in American breech-loading guns. Singularly enough it was blackened by burnt powder, although it had not been torn, nor had it blazed up in the discharge. It was so perfectly uninjured, that the embossed letters of the manufacturer's name, Clebb, could be read.

"That cartridge never belonged to me," said the count, who, as he uttered these words, turned deadly pale, 30

pale, that his wife looked at him with a glance full of terrible anguish.

"Well?"

He made no reply. But at that moment such silence was so eloquent, that the countess felt sick at heart, and whispered in his ear,—“Then Cocoleu was right, after all!”

Not one feature of this dramatic scene had escaped M. Galpin-Daveline's watchful eye. He had surprised signs of terror on every face; still he made no remark. He took the metal case from the count's hands, knowing that it might become an important piece of evidence; and for nearly a minute he turned it round and round, looking at it from all sides, and examining it in the light with the utmost attention. Then turning to the peasants, who were standing respectfully near the door, he asked them,—“Where did you find this cartridge, my friends?”

“Close by the old ivy-grown tower, where the tools are kept.”

M. Seneschal, who had in the mean time succeeded in recovering his self-control, now remarked,—“Surely the murderer cannot have fired from there. You cannot even see the door of the house from the old tower.”

“That may be,” replied the magistrate; “but the cartridge-case does not necessarily fall to the ground at the place where the gun is discharged. It falls as soon as the gun is cocked to reload.”

This was so true, that even Dr. Seignebos had nothing to say.

“Now, my friends,” asked M. Galpin-Daveline, “which of you found this cartridge-case?”

“We were all together when we saw it, and picked it up.”

“Well, then, all three of you must give me your names and addresses, so that I can send for you when you are wanted.”

This had just been done, when the furious gallop of a horse was heard approaching the house; the next moment a man who had been sent to Sauveterre for medicines, came in. He was furious. “That rascal of a druggist!” he exclaimed, “I thought he would never open his shop!”

Dr. Seignebos eagerly seized hold of the things now brought him, and then, bowing with mock respect to the

magistrate, he remarked,—“I know very well, sir, how pressing is the necessity to have a culprit’s head cut off; but I think it is almost as pressing to save the life of an injured man. I have probably delayed the binding-up of the count’s wounds longer than I ought to have done; and I beg you will now leave me alone, so as to enable me to do my duty to him.”

VI.

THERE was nothing more to be done by the investigating magistrate, the public prosecutor, or the mayor. Accordingly they took their departure, promising to send the count immediate news of anything that might be discovered.

The fire was now dying out for want of fuel. A few hours had sufficed to destroy all that the hard work and incessant care of many years had accomplished. The once charming and envied mansion presented nothing but a few blackened walls, with adjacent heaps of ashes, and smouldering timbers, from which columns of smoke were slowly rising. By Captain Parenteau’s direction, all the objects saved had been stored under the shelter of the ruins of the old castle, where furniture, articles of vertu, agricultural implements, carts, casks, and sacks of oats and rye were huddled together pell-mell. Here also were the horses, cattle, and sheep, rescued from their burning stalls with infinite labour, and at great risk of life. Few of the people had left as yet. With greater zeal than ever, the firemen, aided by the peasants, deluged the remains of the dwelling-house with water. They had nothing to fear from the fire; but they desired to keep the bodies of their unfortunate companions from being entirely consumed.

“What a terrible scourge fire is!” exclaimed M. Seneschal.

Neither M. Galpin-Daveline nor the mayor made any answer, though they felt their hearts oppressed by the sad sight before them.

The firemen recognised the mayor, and greeted him with cheers. He went rapidly towards them; and, for the first time since the alarm had been raised, the investigating magistrate and the public prosecutor were left alone together. They kept silent for a moment, each trying to read

in the other's eyes the secret of his thoughts. At last M. Daubigeon asked,—“Well?”

“This is a fearful calamity,” replied M. Galpin-Daveline.

“What is your opinion?”

“Ah! do I know it myself? I have lost my head: the whole thing seems to me like a nightmare.”

“You cannot really believe that M. de Boiscoran is guilty?”

“I believe nothing. My reason tells me he is innocent. I feel he must be innocent; and yet I see terrible evidence rising against him.”

The public-prosecutor seemed overwhelmed. “Alas!” he said, “why did you, contrary to everybody's opinion, insist upon examining Cocoleu, a poor idiotic wretch?”

“You do not mean to reproach me, sir, for having followed the impulses of my conscience?”

“I reproach you with nothing.”

“A horrible crime has been committed; and my duty compelled me to do all that lies in the power of man to discover the culprit.”

“Yes; and the man who is accused of the crime is your friend, and only yesterday you spoke of his friendship as your best chance of success in life.”

“Sir?”

“Are you surprised to find me so well informed? Have you forgotten that nothing escapes the idle curiosity of a little town. I know that your fondest hope was to become a member of M. de Boiscoran's family, and that you counted upon him to back you in your efforts to obtain the hand of one of his cousins.”

“I do not deny it.”

“Unfortunately you have been tempted by the prestige you might gain in a great and famous trial. You have laid aside all prudence: and your projects are forgotten. Whether M. de Boiscoran be innocent or guilty, his family will never forgive you your interference. If he is guilty, they will blame you for having handed him over to justice; if he is innocent, they will blame you even more for having suspected him.”

M. Galpin hung his head as if to conceal his trouble. At last he asked,—“And what would you do in my place?”

"I would leave the case to others, although it is rather late."

"If I did so, I should compromise my career."

"Even that would be better for you than to engage in an affair in which you cannot preserve the calmness and impartiality which are the first and indispensable virtues of an upright magistrate."

M. Galpin-Daveline was growing impatient. "Do you think," he said, "that I am a man to be turned aside from my duty by considerations of friendship or personal interest?"

"I said nothing of the kind."

"Did you not see just now how I carried on the inquiry? Did you not see me start when Cocoleu first mentioned M. de Boiscoran's name? If he had denounced any one else, I should probably have let the matter rest there. But precisely because M. de Boiscoran is a friend of mine, and because I have great expectations from him, I have insisted and persisted, and I do so still."

The public prosecutor shrugged his shoulders. "That is it exactly," he said. "Because M. de Boiscoran is a friend of yours, you are afraid of being accused of weakness; and you are going to be hard, pitiless, unjust even, against him. Because you had great expectations from him, you will insist upon finding him guilty. And you call yourself impartial?"

M. Galpin-Daveline had reassumed all his usual rigidity as he solemnly replied, "I am sure of myself."

"Have a care!"

"My mind is made up, sir."

At this moment M. Seneschal joined them again: he was accompanied by Captain Parenteau. "Well, gentlemen," he asked, "what have you resolved?"

"We are going to Boiscoran," replied the magistrate.

"What! Immediately?"

"Yes: I wish to find M. de Boiscoran in bed. I am so anxious about it that I shall do without my clerk."

Captain Parenteau bowed and exclaimed,—“Your clerk is here, sir; he was but just inquiring for you. Here, Mechinet, Mechinet!”

A fat, little, gray-headed man, of jovial mien, at once came running up, and informed the party that a neighbour having told him what had happened, he had started after

his superior, the investigating magistrate, on foot, walking as fast as he could.

"How do you propose going to Boiscoran?" asked the mayor.

"I do not know yet. Mechinet will have to find some conveyance."

The clerk was starting off, when M. Seneschal held him back, exclaiming, "My horse and carriage are at your disposal. Any one of these peasants can drive you. Captain Parenteau and I will get back to Sauveterre in some farmer's waggon; we ought to be there as soon as possible. I have just heard alarming news. There may be some disorder. The peasant-women who attend the market have circulated exciting reports, exaggerating the night's calamities. They have asserted that ten or twelve men have been killed, and that the incendiary, M. de Boiscoran, has been arrested. The crowd has gone to condole with poor Guillebault's widow; and there has been a demonstration before the house of the demoiselles de Lavarande, where Made-moiselle de Chandore, M. de Boiscoran's betrothed, is stopping."

In ordinary times, M. Seneschal would not have intrusted his famous horse, Caraby, which he considered the best in the province, to the hands of a stranger, for anything in the world. But he was evidently terribly upset, as could be plainly seen despite the efforts he made to reassume official dignity and self-possession.

He made a sign, and the carriage was at once got ready. But when he asked for a driver, no one came forward. All these good people who had spent the night abroad were anxious to return home, where their cattle required their presence. Eventually, however, young Ribot offered his assistance, and seizing hold of the whip and the reins, took his seat on the box, while the investigating magistrate, the public prosecutor, and the clerk got into the vehicle.

"Above all, take care of Caraby," begged M. Seneschal, who at the last moment felt almost overcome with anxiety for his favourite.

"Don't be afraid, sir," replied the young man as he started the horse. "If I strike too hard, M. Mechinet will stop me."

This Mechinet, the investigating magistrate's clerk, was almost a power in Sauveterre; and the greatest person-

ages there paid their court to him. His official duties were not merely of a very humble nature, but also ill-paid. However, he knew how to eke out his income by other occupations, of which the court took no notice; these adding largely both to his means and to his importance in the community. Being a skilful lithographer, he printed all the visiting-cards which the people of Sauveterre ordered at the principal printing office, that where the local journal, *L'Independant*, was published. An able accountant, moreover, he kept several tradespeople's books. Some of the country people, fond of litigation, also came to him for legal advice; and he was an adept at drawing up agreements. In addition, he had been director of the fireman's band, and manager of the choral society during several years; while, as correspondent of the Parisian Dramatic Authors' Society, he obtained free admission to the theater, not only to the house, but also to the sacred precincts behind the scenes. Finally, he was always ready to give lessons in writing or grammar to children, besides teaching amateurs how to play on the flute and the horn. These varied talents had not unnaturally won him the hostility of all the other teachers and public servants of the community, such as the mayor's clerk, the tax-collector's clerk, and kindred individuals. But he had gradually conquered all these enemies by the unmistakable superiority of his talents. In time they themselves fell in with the universal habit, and, when anything special happened, said to each other, "Let us go and consult Mechinet." He himself concealed, under an appearance of imperturbable good nature, the ambition by which he was devoured: he wanted to become rich, and to rise in the world. In fact, Mechinet was a diplomat, working in secret, but as cunning as Talleyrand. He had already succeeded in making himself the one really great personage of Sauveterre. The town was full of his fame; nothing was done without him; and he had not a declared enemy in the place.

In fact, people were afraid of him, and dreaded his terrible tongue. Not that he had ever injured anybody, he was too wise for that; but they knew the harm he might do, if he chose, for he was master of every important secret in Sauveterre, being the best informed man in the town as regarded all their little intrigues, private foibles,

and dark antecedents. This knowledge of his gave him quite an exceptional position. As he was unmarried, he lived with his sisters, the devout Demoiselles Mechinet, the best dressmakers in the town, through whom he heard all that was going on in society; comparing their gossip with what he heard in court, or at the newspaper office. Thus he would at times exclaim:—How could anything escape me, when I have the church and the press, the court and the theater, to keep me informed?"

Such a man would have considered himself disgraced if he had not known every detail of M. de Boiscoran's private affairs. He did not hesitate, therefore, while the carriage was rolling along, to explain to his companions the position of the accused nobleman.

M. Jacques de Boiscoran seldom spent more than a few weeks a year on his estate near Sauveterre. He lived mostly in Paris, where his family owned a mansion in the Rue de l'Universite. His parents were still alive. His father, the Marquis de Boiscoran, was the owner of considerable property. He had been a deputy under Louis Philippe, a representative of the people in 1848, and had withdrawn from public life when the Second Empire was established. Since that time he employed all his money and all his energies in collecting rare books and costly porcelain. The Marquis's wife, a Chalusse by birth, had enjoyed the reputation of being one of the most beautiful and most gifted ladies at the court of the Citizen King. At a certain period in her life, unfortunately, slander had attacked her; in 1845 or 1846, her name was coupled with that of a young lawyer of distinction, who had since become an eminent judge. As she grew old, the marchioness devoted herself to politics, just as other women turn their attention to religion. While her husband boasted that he had not read a newspaper for ten years, she made her *salon* a kind of parliamentary centre, not without its influence on political affairs.

Although Jacques de Boiscoran's parents were still alive, he possessed a small fortune of his own, representing 30,000 francs a year—which income was mainly derived from the estate of Boiscoran left him in 1868 by one of his uncles, his father's oldest brother, who had died a childless widower in 1868. Jacques de Boiscoran was at this moment about twenty-six or twenty-seven years old, of

a dark complexion, tall, strong, and well made; though not exactly a handsome man, he had one of those frank, intelligent faces which please one at first sight. His character was not so well known at Sauveterre as his person. Those who had had dealings with him, however, described him as an honourable upright man: while his companions spoke of him as witty and generous, fond of pleasure, and always in a good humour. At the time of the German invasion, he had been made a captain of one of the companies of mobiles raised in the district, and he had behaved so bravely under fire, that General Chanzy rewarded him, when wounded, with the cross of the legion of honour.

"And such a man committed that crime at Valpinson," said M. Daubigeon to the investigating magistrate. "No, it is impossible! I am sure he will soon scatter all our doubts to the four winds."

"Oh, that may be done at once," remarked young Ribot; "for here we are."

In many provinces of France the name of chateau is given to well-nigh every little country house with a weathervane on its pointed roof. • Boiscoran, however, is a real chateau, built towards the end of the seventeenth century, in wretched taste it is true, but in the massive style of a fortress. Its position is superb. It stands in the midst of woods and pasture lands; while at the foot of the sloping pleasure-grounds there flows a little river, merrily splashing over its pebbly bed, and called "*La Pibole*"—the Magpie—on account of its perpetual babbling.

VII.

It was seven o'clock when the carriage containing the judicial functionaries drove into the courtyard at Boiscoran,—a vast paved square planted with lime-trees, and surrounded by farm-buildings. The chateau was wide awake. Before her house-door, the farmer's wife was cleaning the huge cauldron in which she had prepared the morning soup; the maids were coming and going to and fro, while just outside the stable a groom was energetically rubbing down a handsome, thorough-bred horse.

On the front steps stood Master Anthony, M. de Boisco-

ran's valet, smoking a cigar in the bright sunlight, and overlooking the farm operations. He was a man of nearly fifty, still very active, who had been bequeathed to his new master, together with the estate. He was a widower, his only daughter being in the marchioness' service. As he had been born in the family, and had never left it, he looked upon himself as almost a Boiscoran, and saw no difference between his own interests and those of his master. In fact, he was treated less like a servant than like a friend; and he fancied he knew everything about M. de Boiscoran's affairs.

When he saw the investigating magistrate and the public prosecutor step out of the carriage, he threw away his cigar, hurried down the steps, and, bowing deeply, said to them with his most engaging smile,—“Ah, gentlemen! what a pleasant surprise! My master will be delighted.”

With strangers, Anthony would not have allowed himself such familiarity, for he believed in etiquette; but he had seen M. Daubigeon more than once at the chateau; and he knew the plans that had been discussed between M. Galpin-Daveline and his master. Hence he was not a little amazed at the embarrassed stiffness of the two gentlemen, and at the tone of voice in which the magistrate asked him,—“Is M. de Boiscoran up?”

“Not yet,” he replied; “and I have orders not to wake him. He came home late last night, and wanted to make up this morning.”

Instinctively the magistrate and the public prosecutor averted their heads, each fearing to meet the other's eyes.

“Ah! M. de Boiscoran came home late last night?” repeated M. Galpin.

“Towards midnight, a little later perhaps.”

“At what time had he gone out?”

“He left here about eight.”

“How was he dressed?”

“As usual. He wore light gray trousers, a shooting-jacket of brown velveteen, and a large straw hat.”

“Did he take his gun?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Do you know where he went?”

But for the respect which he felt for his master's friends, Anthony would not have answered these questions, which he thought were extremely impertinent. But this last

question seemed to him to go beyond all fair limits. He replied, therefore, in a tone of injured self-respect,—“ I am not in the habit of asking my master where he goes when he leaves the house, nor where he has been when he comes back.”

M. Daubigeon understood perfectly the honourable feelings which actuated the faithful servant. Accordingly he said to him with an air of unmistakable kindness,—“ Do not imagine, my friend, that we ask you these questions out of mere idle curiosity. Tell us what you know; for your frankness may be more useful to your master than you have any idea of.”

Anthony looked in turn at the magistrate, at the public prosecutor, at Mechinet, and finally at Ribot, who was securing Caraby to a tree. The old servant was plainly stupefied. “ I assure you, gentlemen,” said he, “ I do not know where M. de Boiscoran spent the evening.”

“ You have no suspicion ? ”

“ No.”

“ Perhaps he went to Brechy to see a friend ? ”

“ I do not know of any friends he has at Brechy.”

“ What did he do after he came home ? ”

At this question the old servant showed evident signs of embarrassment. “ Let me think,” he said. “ My master went up to his bed-room, and remained there four or five minutes. Then he came down, ate a piece of *pate*, and drank a glass of wine. Then he lit a cigar, and told me to go to bed, adding that he meant to take a little walk, and would undress without my help.”

“ And then you went to bed ? ”

“ Of course.”

“ So that you do not know what your master did ? ”

“ I beg your pardon. I heard him open the garden gate.”

“ He did not appear to you different from usual ? ”

“ No; he was as he always is,—quite cheerful: he was singing.”

“ Can you show me the gun he took with him ? ”

“ No. My master probably took it to his room.”

M. Daubigeon was about to make a remark, when the magistrate stopped him by a gesture, and eagerly asked,—“ How long is it since your master and Count Claudieuse have ceased seeing each other ? ”

Anthony trembled, as if a dark presentiment had entered his mind. He replied,—“A long time : at least I think so.”

“You are of course aware that they are on bad terms together?”

“Oh!” . . .

“They have had violent altercations?”

“Something unpleasant happened, I know ; but it was not much. “As they do not visit each other, they cannot well hate each other. Besides, I have heard master say a hundred times, that he looked upon Count Claudieuse as one of the best and most honourable men, and that he respected him highly.”

For a minute or so M. Galpin-Daveline kept silent, thinking whether he had forgotten anything. Then he asked suddenly, “How far is it from here to Valpinson?”

“Three miles, sir,” replied Anthony.

“If you were going there, what road would you take?”

“The high road which passes by Brechy.”

“You would not go across the marshes?”

“Certainly not.”

“Why not?”

“Because the Seille is out of its banks, and the ditches are full of water.”

“Is not the way much shorter through the forest?”

“Yes, the way is shorter ; but it would take more time. The paths are very indistinct, and overgrown with briars.”

The public prosecutor could hardly conceal his disappointment. Anthony’s answers seemed to become worse and worse.

“Now,” asked the investigating magistrate again, “if fire broke out at Valpinson, would you see it from here?”

“I don’t think so, sir. There are hills and woods between us.”

“Can you hear the Brechy bells from here?”

“When the wind is north, yes, sir.”

“And last night, how was it?”

“The wind was from the west, as it always is when we have a storm.”

“So that you heard nothing? You do not know what a terrible calamity—”

“A calamity? I do not understand you, sir.”

The conversation had been going on in the court-yard

into which at this moment there rode two gendarmes on horseback, whom M. Galpin-Daveline had sent for just before leaving Valpinson. When old Anthony perceived them, he exclaimed, "Great God! what is the meaning of this? I must wake my master."

But the magistrate stopped him, saying harshly,—“Not a step! Not a word!” And then, pointing out Ribot to the gendarmes, he added, “Keep your eyes on that lad, and don’t let him communicate with anybody.” Finally, turning again to Anthony, M. Galpin said,—“Now show us to M. de Boiscoran’s bedroom.”

VIII.

IN spite of its grand feudal air, the chateau of Boiscoran was, after all, little more than a bachelor’s modest home, and in a very bad state of preservation. Of the eighty or a hundred rooms which it contained, no more than eight or ten were furnished, and this only in the simplest possible manner. Indeed a drawing-room, a dining-room, and a few bedrooms for friends were all that M. de Boiscoran required during his short visits to the place. He himself occupied a small room on the second floor.

When they reached the door of this apartment, guided by old Anthony, the magistrate ordered the servant to knock. He obeyed: and immediately a youthful, hearty voice replied from within, “Who’s there?”

“It is I,” said Anthony. “I should like—”

“Go to the devil!” broke in the voice.

“But, sir—”

“Let me sleep, rascal. I have not been able to close an eye till now.” The magistrate, becoming impatient, pushed the servant aside, and, seizing the door-knob tried to open it: it was locked inside. But he lost no time in saying, “It is I, M. de Boiscoran: open, if you please!”

“What is it, dear M. Galpin?” asked the voice cheerfully.

“I must speak to you.”

“And I am at your service, illustrious jurist. Just give me time to veil my Apollonian form in a pair of trousers, and I appear”

—most immediately, the door opened; and M. de Bois

coran presented himself; his hair dishevelled, his eyes heavy with sleep, but looking bright in his youth and full health, with smiling lips and open hands. "Upon my word!" he said. "That was a happy inspiration you had, my dear Galpin. You come to join me at breakfast?" And, bowing to M. Daubigeon, he added, "Not to say how much I thank you for bringing our excellent public prosecutor with you. This *is* a judicial visit!—"

But he paused, chilled as he was by M. Daubigeon's icy face, and amazed at M. Galpin-Daveline's refusal to take his proffered hand. "Why," he said, "what is the matter, my dear friend?"

The magistrate had never been stiffer in his life, when he replied, "We shall have to forget our acquaintance, sir. It is not as a friend I come to-day, but as a magistrate."

M. de Boiscoran looked confounded; but not a shadow of trouble appeared on his frank and open face. "I'll be hanged," he said, "if I understand—"

"Let us go in," interrupted M. Galpin-Daveline.

They went in; and, as they passed the door, Mechainet whispered into the public prosecutor's ear,—“Sir, that man is certainly innocent. A guilty man would never have received us thus.”

"Silence, sir!" said the public prosecutor, despite the fact that he was probably of the clerk's opinion. "Silence!"

And he gravely walked towards one of the windows, leaving M. Galpin-Daveline standing in the center of the room, trying to see everything in it, and to fix its appearance in his memory, down to the smallest details. The prevailing disorder showed clearly how hastily M. de Boiscoran had gone to bed the night before. His clothes, his boots, his shirt, and his straw hat lay scattered about on the chairs and the floor. He had worn those very light gray trousers, which had been successively seen and recognised by Cocoleu, Ribot, Gaudry, and Madame Courtois.

"Now, sir," began M. de Boiscoran with that tone of annoyance which shows that a man thinks a joke has been carried far enough, "will you please tell me what procures me the honour of this early visit?"

Not a muscle in M. Galpin's face moved. As if the question had been addressed to some one else, he said coldly,—“will you please show us your hands, sir?”

M. de Boiscoran's cheeks turned crimson; and his eyes assumed an expression of strange perplexity. "If this is a joke," he said, "it has perhaps lasted long enough."

He was evidently getting angry. M. Daubigeon thought it better to interfere, and accordingly remarked,—“Unfortunately, sir, the question is a most serious one. Do what the magistrate desires.”

More and more amazed, M. de Boiscoran looked rapidly around him. Near the door stood Anthony, his faithful old servant, with anguish written on his face. Near the fireplace, the clerk had improvised a table, and put his paper, his pens, and his horn inkstand in readiness. Then, with a shrug of his shoulders, which showed that he failed to understand, M. de Boiscoran showed his hands. They were perfectly clean and white: there was not even a speck of dirt under the long polished nails.

“When did you last wash your hands?” asked M. Galpin, after having examined them minutely.

At this question, M. de Boiscoran's face brightened up; and breaking out into a hearty laugh, he said,—“Upon my word! I confess you nearly caught me. I was on the point of getting angry. I almost feared—”

“And there was good reason for fear,” said M. Galpin-Daveline; “for a terrible charge has been brought against you. And it may be, that on your answer to my question, ridiculous as it seems to you, your honour may depend, and perhaps your liberty.”

This time there was no mistake possible. M. de Boiscoran felt that kind of terror which the law inspires even in the best of men, when they find themselves suddenly accused of a crime. He turned pale, and then he said in a troubled voice,—“What! A charge has been brought against me, and you, M. Galpin-Daveline, come to my house to examine me?”

“I am a magistrate, sir.”

“But you were also my friend. If any one had dared to accuse you of a crime, a mean act, anything infamous, in my presence, I should have defended you, sir, with all my energy, without hesitation, and without a doubt. I should have defended you, till absolute, undeniable evidence was brought forward of your culpability; and even then I should have pitied you, remembering that I had esteemed you so highly as to favour your alliance with my family.

But you—I am accused, I do not know of what, falsely, wrongly; and at once you hasten hither, you believe the charge, and consent to become my judge. Well, let it be so! I washed my hands last night after coming home.”

M. Galpin-Daveline had uttered a vain boast in praising his self-possession and his perfect control over himself. He did not move when these words fell upon his ear; but he asked again in the same calm tone,—“What has become of the water you used for that purpose?”

“It is probably still there, in my dressing-room.”

The magistrate at once went in. On the marble table stood a basin full of water. That water was black and dirty. At the bottom lay particles of charcoal. On the top, mixed with the soapsuds, were swimming some extremely slight but unmistakable fragments of charred paper. With infinite care the magistrate carried the basin to the table at which Mechinet had taken a seat; and, pointing at it, he asked M. de Boiscoran,—“Is that the water in which you washed your hands last night after coming home?”

“Yes,” replied the other with an air of careless indifference.

“You had been handling charcoal, or some inflammable material.”

“You can see so yourself.”

Standing face to face, the public prosecutor and the clerk exchanged rapid glances. They both experienced the same feeling. If M. de Boiscoran was not innocent, he must be a marvellously cool and energetic man, carrying out a long premeditated plan of action; for every one of his answers seemed to tighten the net in which he was taken. The investigating magistrate himself seemed to be struck by this; but it was only for a moment, for, turning to the clerk, he said,—“Write that down!”

He dictated to him the whole evidence, most minutely and accurately, correcting himself every now and then to substitute a better word, or to improve his style. When he had read it over he said, “Let us go on, sir. You were out last night?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Having left the house at eight, you returned only about midnight.”

“After midnight.”

"You took your gun?"

"Yes, sir."

"Where is it?"

With an air of indifference, M. de Boiscoran pointed to the corner of the fireplace, exclaiming, "There it is!"

M. Galpin took it up quickly. It was a superb double-barrelled weapon. On the beautifully carved woodwork the manufacturer's name, Clebb, was engraved. "When did you last fire this gun?" asked the magistrate.

"Some four or five days ago."

"What for?"

"To shoot some rabbits infesting my woods."

M. Galpin raised and lowered the cock with all possible care: he noticed that it resembled the Remington patent. He next opened the chamber, and ascertained that the gun was loaded. Each barrel had a cartridge in it. Then he put the gun back in its place, and, pulling from his pocket the leaden cartridge-case which Pitard had found, he showed it to M. de Boiscoran, and asked him,—*"Do you recognise this?"*

"Perfectly!" replied the other. "It is a case of one of my cartridges which I probably threw away as useless."

"Do you think you are the only person in the neighbourhood who has a gun of this kind?"

"I do not think it: I am quite sure of it."

"So that you must, as a matter of course, have been at the spot where such a cartridge-case as this has been found?"

"Not necessarily. I have often seen children pick up these things, and play with them."

The investigating magistrate took a seat. "If that is so," he began again, "I beg you to give me an account of how you spent the evening after eight o'clock: do not hurry, consider, take your time; for your answers are of the utmost importance."

M. de Boiscoran had so far remained quite cool; but his calmness betrayed a terrible storm within. This warning, and, even more so, the tone in which it was given, revolted him as an odious hypocrisy. Breaking out all of a sudden, he cried,—*"After all, sir, what do you want of me? What am I accused of?"*

M. Galpin did not stir. "You will know at the proper time," he replied. "First answer my question, and believe

me in your own interest. Answer frankly, What did you do last night?"

"How do I know? I walked about."

"That is no answer."

"Still it is so. I went out with no specific purpose: I walked at haphazard."

"Your gun on your shoulder?"

"I always take my gun: my servant can tell you so."

"Did you cross the Seille marshes!"

"No."

The magistrate shook his head gravely. "You are not telling the truth," he said. "your boots there at the foot of the bed speak against you. Where does the mud come from with which they are covered?"

"The meadows around Boiscoran are very wet."

"Don't deny any further. You were seen there. Young Ribot met you at the moment when you were crossing the canal."

M. de Boiscoran made no reply.

"Where were you going?" asked the magistrate.

For the first time a real air of embarrassment appeared on the features of the accused,—the embarrassment of a man who suddenly sees an abyss opening before him. He hesitated; and, seeing that it was useless to deny, he said—"I was going to Brechy."

"What for?"

"To see my wood-merchant, to settle about this year's wood. I did not find him at home, and came back by the high road."

M. Galpin stopped him by a gesture. "That is not so," he said severely. "You never went to Brechy."

"I beg your pardon."

"And the proof is, that, about eleven o'clock, you were hurriedly crossing the forest of Rochepommier."

"I?"

"Yes, you! And do not say 'No;' for there are your trousers torn to pieces by the thorns and briers through which you must have made your way."

"There are briers elsewhere besides the forest."

"To be sure: but you were seen there."

"By whom?"

"By Guadry the poacher. And he saw so much of you, that he could tell us in what a bad humour you were. You

were very angry. You were talking aloud, swearing, and pulling the leaves from the trees."

"So saying, the magistrate got up and took the shooting-jacket, which was lying on a chair not far from him. He searched the pockets, and pulled out of one a handful of leaves. "Look here! you see Gaudry has told the truth."

"There are leaves everywhere," muttered M. de Boiscoran.

"Yes; but a woman, Madame Courtois, saw you come out of the forest of Rochepommier. You helped her to put a sack of flour on her ass, which she could not lift alone. Do you deny it? No, you are right; for, look here! on the sleeve of your coat I see something white, which, no doubt, is flour."

M. de Boiscoran hung his head. The magistrate went on,—“You confess, then, that last night, between ten and eleven o'clock, you were at Valpinson?”

"No, sir, I do not."

"But this cartridge-case which I have just shown you was picked up at Valpinson, close by the ruins of the old castle."

"Well, sir, have I not told you before that I have a hundred times seen children pick up these cases to play with? Besides, if I had really been at Valpinson, why should I deny it?"

M. Galpin rose to his full height, and exclaimed in the most solemn manner,—“I will tell you why! Last night, between ten and eleven, Valpinson was set on fire; and it has been burnt to the ground."

"Oh!"

"Last night the Count de Claudieuse was fired at twice."

"Great God!"

"And it is thought, in fact there are strong reasons to think, that you, Jacques de Boiscoran, are the incendiary and the assassin."

IX.

M. DE BOISCORAN looked around him, like a man suddenly seized with vertigo—pale, as if all the blood in his veins had rushed to his heart. He saw nothing but mournful, dismayed faces. Old Anthony leant against the

door, as if he feared to fall. The clerk held his pen in the air, overcome with amazement. M. Daubigeon hung his head. "This is horrible!" he murmured: "this is horrible!"

He fell heavily into a chair, pressing his hands on his heart, as if to keep down the sobs that threatened to rise. M. Galpin alone seemed to remain perfectly cool. The law, which he imagined he was representing in all its dignity, knows nothing of emotions. His thin lips even trembled a little, as if a slight smile was about to burst forth; it was the cold smile of the ambitious man, pleased with the manner in which he has played his little part. Did not everything tend to prove that Jacques de Boiscoran was the guilty man, and that, he—Galpin—had acted rightly in sacrificing his friendship to the opportunity of gaining high distinction? After a minute's silence, which seemed to last a century, the investigating magistrate crossed his arms over his chest, and, walking towards the accused, exclaiming:—"Do you confess?"

M. de Boiscoran drew himself up to his full height, as he cried, "What? What do you want me to confess?"

"That you committed the crime at Valpinson."

The young man pressed his hands convulsively on his brow. "What, I! the author of that fearful, cowardly crime?" he said. "Is it possible! Is it likely? I might confess, and you would not believe me. No! I am sure you would not believe my own words."

He would have moved the marble mantelpiece sooner than M. Galpin-Daveline, who merely replied in icy tones,—"I am not in question. Why refer to relations which must be forgotten? It is no longer the friend who speaks to you, not even the man, but simply the magistrate. You were seen."

"What wretch has said so?"

"Cocoleu!"

M. de Boiscoran seemed to be overwhelmed. "Cocoleu!" he stammered. "That poor epileptic idiot whom the Countess de Claudieuse has been taking care of?"

"The same."

"And upon the strength of the senseless words of an imbecile I am charged with incendiarism, with murder?"

The magistrate made an evident effort to assume an

air of impassive dignity, as he replied,—“For an hour, at least, poor Cocoleu has been in the full enjoyment of his faculties. The ways of Providence are inscrutable.”

“But, sir—”

And what does Cocoleu depose? He says he saw you kindle the fire with your own hands, then conceal yourself behind a pile of wood and fire twice at Count Claudieuse.”

“And all that appears quite natural to you?”

“No! At first it shocked me, as it shocked everybody. You seem to be so far above suspicion. But a moment afterwards the cartridge-case, which can only have belonged to you, was found. Then, upon my unexpected arrival here, I find the water in which you have washed your hands, black with coal, and with little pieces of charred paper swimming on the top of it.”

“Yes,” said M. de Boiscoran in an undertone; “it is fate.”

“And that is not all,” continued the magistrate, raising his voice, “I question you, and you admit having been out from eight o’clock till after midnight. I ask what you were doing, and you refuse to tell me. I insist, and you tell a falsehood. In order to confound you I am forced to quote the evidence of young Ribot, of Gaudry, and Madame Courtois, who saw you at the very places where you deny having been. That circumstance alone condemns you. Why not tell me what you were doing during these four hours? You claim to be innocent. Help me, then, to establish your innocence. Speak, tell me what you were doing between eight o’clock and midnight.”

Before M. de Boiscoran had time to answer, a gendarme entered the room, and, turning to the judicial functionaries, excitedly exclaimed, “Gentlemen, there are more than a hundred peasants, men and women, in the yard, who clamour for M. de Boiscoran. They threaten to drag him down to the river. Some of the men are armed with pitchforks; but the women are the maddest. My comrade and I have done our best to keep them quiet.”

For some time past a growing buzz of voices had been heard, and now, in confirmation of the gendarme’s statement, distinct phrases fell upon the ear, “Drown Boiscoran! Let us drown the incendiary!”

“Return, and tell these people,” said M. Daubignon to

the gendarme, "that the authorities are this moment examining the accused ; that they interrupt us ; and that if they persist, they will have to deal with me."

The gendarme obeyed his orders. M. de Boiscoran had turned deadly pale, and muttered, "What ! do these unfortunate people believe me guilty ?"

"Yes," said M. Galpin-Daveline, who had overheard the words, "and you would understand their rage if you knew all that has happened."

"What else ?"

"Two Sauveterre firemen, one the father of five children, have perished in the flames. Two other men, a farmer of Brechy, and a gendarme who tried to rescue them, have been so seriously injured that their lives are in danger." M. de Boiscoran remained silent.

"And it is you," continued the magistrate, "whom the people charge with all these calamities. You see how important it is for you to exculpate yourself."

"Ah, how can I ?"

"If you are innocent, nothing is easier. Tell us how you employed your time last night."

"I have told you all I can say."

The magistrate seemed to reflect for a minute. "Take care, M. de Boiscoran," he ultimately said: "I shall be forced to have you arrested."

"Do so."

"I shall be obliged to order your arrest at once, and to send you to Sauveterre prison."

"Very well."

"Then you confess your guilt ?"

"I confess that I am the victim of an unheard of combination of circumstances ; I confess that you are right, and that certain fatalities can only be explained by the belief in Providence : but I swear by all that is holy in the world, I am innocent."

"Prove it."

"Ah ! would I not do so if I could !"

"Be good enough then to finish dressing, sir, and prepare to follow the gendarmes."

Without a word, M. de Boiscoran went into his dressing-room, followed by his servant carrying his clothes. M. Galpin-Daveline was so busy dictating to the clerk the latter part of the examination, that he seemed to forget his

prisoner. Old Anthony availed himself of this opportunity. "Sir," he whispered into his master's ear while helping him to put on his clothes.

"What?"

"Hush, don't speak so loud! The other window is open. It is only about twenty feet to the ground; the ground is soft. Close by is one of the cellar openings; and in there, you know, is the old hiding-place. It is only five miles to the coast, and I will have a good horse ready for you to-night at the park-gate."

A bitter smile crossed M. de Boiscoran's lips, as he replied, "And you, too, my old friend: you think I am guilty?"

"I entreat you," said Anthony, "I answer for everything. It is barely twenty feet. . . . In your mother's name—"

But, instead of answering him, M. de Boiscoran turned round, and called M. Galpin-Daveline, saying, "Look at that window, sir! I have money, fast horses; and the sea is only five miles off. A guilty man would have fled; but I stay; for I am innocent."

In one point at least M. de Boiscoran was quite right. Nothing would have been easier for him than to get into the garden, and reach the hiding-place which his servant had suggested. But after that? With old Anthony's assistance, he had, to be sure, some chance of escaping altogether. Still, he might have been discovered in his hiding-place, or overtaken in his ride to the coast. Even if he had succeeded, what would have become of him? His flight would necessarily have been looked upon as a confession of his guilt. Under such circumstances, the fact of his having resisted the temptation to escape, and of having formally called the magistrate's attention to the point, was rather a proof of great cleverness than a token of innocence.

M. Galpin, at all events, looked upon it in that light; for he judged others by himself. Carefully and cunningly calculating every step he took in life, he did not believe in sudden inspirations. It was, therefore, with an ironical smile that he answered—"Very well, sir. This circumstance shall be mentioned, as well as the others, at the trial."

M. Daubigeon had not spoken since addressing the gendarme in reference to the mob outside. However, when M. de Boiscoran came out of his dressing-room, fully

dressed and ready, he rose from his chair and said,—“One more question, sir.”

The unfortunate fellow bowed. He was pale, but calm and self-possessed. “I am ready to reply,” he said.

“You seemed surprised and indignant at any one’s daring to accuse you. That was weakness. Justice is but the work of man, and must needs judge by appearances. If you reflect, you will see that appearances are all against you.”

“I see it but too clearly.”

“If you were on a jury, you would not hesitate to pronounce a man guilty upon such evidence.”

“No, sir, no.”

“You are not sincere!” exclaimed the public prosecutor.

M. de Boiscoran sadly shook his head, and replied,—“I speak without the slightest hope of convincing you, but in all sincerity. No, I should not condemn a man as you say, if he asserted his innocence, and if I did not see any reason for his crime. For, after all, unless a man is mad, he does not commit a crime for nothing. Now I ask you, how could I, upon whom fortune has always smiled; I who am on the eve of marrying one whom I love passionately,—how could I, why should I, set Valpinson on fire, and try to murder the Count de Claudieuse?”

M. Galpin had scarcely been able to disguise his impatience, when he saw the public prosecutor take part in the affair. Seizing, therefore, the opportunity to interfere, he said,—“Your reason, sir, was hatred. You hated the count and the countess mortally. Do not protest: it is of no use. Everybody knows it and you yourself have told me so.”

It was in a tone of crushing disdain that M. de Boiscoran rejoined, “Even if that were so, I do not see what right you have to abuse the confidence of a friend, after having declared, upon your arrival here, that all friendship between us had ceased. But it is not so. I never told you any such thing. I have told you that the count was a troublesome neighbour, very jealous of his rights, and almost absurdly attached to his preserves. I have also told you, that if he declared my public opinions to be abominable, I looked upon him as ridiculous and dangerous. As for the countess, I have simply said, half in jest, that so perfect a person was not to my taste; and that I should be very unhappy if my wife were a Madonna, who hardly ever deigned to set her foot upon the ground.”

"And that was the only reason why you once pointed your gun at the Count de Claudieuse? A little more blood rushing to your head would have made you a murderer on that day."

A terrible spasm betrayed M. de Boiscoran's fury, but he checked himself, and replied—"My passion was less fiery than it may have appeared. I have the most profound respect for the count's character. It is an additional grief to know that he has accused me."

"But he has not accused you!" broke in M. Daubigeon. "On the contrary, he was the first and the most eager to defend you."

And in spite of the signs which M. Galpin-Daveline made, the public prosecutor continued,—“Unfortunately that has nothing to do with the force of the evidence against you. If you persist in keeping silent, you must look forward to a criminal trial, to the punishment of the law. If you are innocent, why not explain the matter? What do you wait for? What do you hope?”

"Nothing."

Mechinet had, in the mean time, completed the official report.

"We must go," said M. Galpin-Daveline.

"Am I at liberty," asked M. de Boiscoran, "to write a few lines to my father and mother? They are old, such an event may kill them."

"Impossible!" said the magistrate, who turned towards Anthony, and added, "I am going to seal up this room, and I shall leave it in your keeping. You know your duty, and the penalties to which you would be subject, if, at the proper time, everything is not found in the condition in which it is now left. Now, how shall we get back to Sauveterre?"

After mature deliberation, it was decided that M. de Boiscoran should go in a carriage of his own, accompanied by one of the gendarmes, while M. Daubigeon, the investigating magistrate, and the clerk returned in the mayor's carriage driven by Ribot, who was furious at being kept under surveillance.

When the last formalities had been fulfilled, M. de Boiscoran came slowly down-stairs. He knew the court was full of furious peasants; and he expected a hostile reception. At first the crowd kept quiet, but when the accused

had taken his seat in the carriage, and the horse went off at a trot, fierce curses arose, and a shower of stones fell, one of them striking a gendarme on the head.

"Upon my word, you bring ill luck, prisoner," said the man, a friend of the other gendarme who had been so much injured at the fire.

M. de Boiscoran made no reply. He sank back into a corner, and seemingly fell into a kind of stupor from which he was not roused till the carriage drove into the yard of the prison at Sauveterre. On the threshold stood Master Blangin, the jailor, smiling with delight at the idea of receiving so distinguished a prisoner.

"I am going to give you my best room," he said; "but first I have to give a receipt to the gendarme, and to enter you in my book." Thereupon he took down his huge greasy register, and wrote the name of Jacques de Boiscoran beneath that of Trumence Cheminot, a vagabond who had just been arrested for breaking into a garden.

It was all over. Jacques de Boiscoran was a prisoner, to be kept in solitary confinement until further orders.

PART II.

THE BOISCORAN TRIAL.

I.

VIEWED from outside, the Paris residence of the Boiscoran family—No. 216, Rue de l'Universite—is a house of modest appearance. The court-yard in front of it is small ; and the few square yards of damp soil in the rear hardly deserve the name of a garden. But the exterior aspect is exceedingly deceptive ; for inside the house each room is marvellously comfortable ; and on all sides the upholstery and decorations present an air of substantial luxury in full keeping with the Boiscorans' wealth and lineage. The most striking apartment in the mansion is the marquis's cabinet of curiosities, situated on the topmost story, and lighted from above like a huge *atelier*. Immense glass cases, standing against the walls, contain the marquis's treasures, his priceless enamels, ivories, bronzes, unique manuscripts, matchless porcelains, and, above all, his *faïences*, his dear *faïences*, the pride and torment of his old age.

Though sixty-one years old at the epoch of this story, the marquis was as straight as ever, and most aristocratically lean. He had a really magnificent nose, which absorbed vast quantities of snuff ; and in his brilliant eyes gleamed the restless cunning of the amateur collector, constantly striving to get the best of crafty dealers in so called curiosities and articles of vertu.

In 1845 the marquis almost reached the summit of political renown by a great speech on the question of public meetings, but at that same hour his watch seemed to have stopped. All his ideas were those of an Orleanist. His general appearance, his clothes, his high cravat, his whiskers, and the way he brushed his hair, all betrayed an ad

mirer and partisan of the so-called Citizen King. However, since the latter's fall, the marquis had not troubled himself about politics; in fact, he troubled himself about nothing at all. Devoting all his time to the accumulation of curiosities, he allowed the marchioness to rule supreme in the house, to administer her large fortune, govern her only son, and decide all family questions without appeal. It was perfectly useless to ask the marquis anything, for his answer was invariably, "Ask my wife."

One afternoon, about three o'clock, while he was busy, magnifying-glass in hand, examining his dishes and plates, the door of his cabinet was suddenly opened and the marchioness entered, holding a blue paper in her hand. Six or eight years younger than her husband, she seemed the very companion for such an idle, indolent man. Her walk, her manner, and her voice, showed her to be a woman of energy and determination. Traces were still apparent of her once celebrated beauty, but she had wisely refrained from trying to conceal the ravages of time, and accepted old age with a good grace.

When she entered her husband's cabinet, she seemed so painfully excited, that the marquis, forgetting that for many a year he had made it a rule of his life to show no emotion, anxiously inquired—"What is the matter? What has happened?"

"A terrible misfortune."

"Is Jacques dead?" cried the old collector.

The marchioness shook her head. "No! it is something worse, perhaps—"

The old man, who had risen at the sight of his wife, sank slowly back into his chair. "Tell me," he stammered—"tell me. I have courage."

She handed him the blue paper she held, and said slowly—"Look at this telegram, which I have just received from old Anthony, our son's valet."

With trembling hands the old marquis unfolded the paper, and read as follows,—*"Terrible misfortune! Jacques accused of having set the chateau at Valpinson on fire, and murdered Count Claudieuse. Terrible evidence against him. When examined, hardly any defense. Just arrested and carried to jail. In despair. What must I do?"*

The marchioness had feared lest the marquis would be

crushed by this despatch, which in its laconic terms betrayed Anthony's abject terror. But it was not so. He put it back on the table in the calmest manner, and said, shrugging his shoulders—"It is absurd!"

His wife did not understand him. She began again,—
"You have not read it carefully, my friend—"

"I understand," he broke in, "that our son is accused of a crime which he has not and can not have committed. You surely do not doubt his innocence? What a mother you would be! On my part, I assure you I am perfectly at ease. Jacques an incendiary! Jacques a murderer! It is nonsense!"

"Ah! you did not read the telegram," exclaimed the marchioness.

"I beg your pardon."

"You did not see that there was evidence against him."

"If there had been none he would not have been arrested. Of course, the matter is disagreeable: it is painful."

"But he did not defend himself."

"Upon my word! Do you think that if somebody accused me of having robbed a shopkeeper's till, I should take the trouble to defend myself?"

"But do you not see that Anthony evidently thinks our son is guilty?"

"Anthony is an old fool!" declared the marquis. Then pulling out his snuff-box, and stuffing his nose full of snuff, he added,—
"Besides, let us consider. Did you not tell me that Jacques is in love with little Denise de Chandore?"

"Desperately. Like a real child."

"And she?"

"She adores Jacques."

"Well. And did you not also tell me that the wedding-day was fixed?"

"Yes, three days ago."

"Has Jacques written to you on the matter?"

"An excellent letter."

"In which he tells you he is coming to Paris?"

"Yes, he wanted to purchase his wedding presents himself."

With a gesture of magnificent indifference, the marquis tapped the top of his snuff-box, and exclaimed,—
"And

you think a boy like our Jacques, a Boiscoran, in love, and beloved, who is about to be married, and has his head full of wedding presents, could have committed such a horrible crime? Such things are not worth discussing, and, with your leave, I shall return to my occupation."

If doubt is contagious, confidence is still more so. Gradually the marchioness's apprehensions gave way in presence of her husband's perfect assurance. The blood came back to her pale cheeks; and she said in a stronger voice:—"After all, I may have been too easily frightened."

"Yes, much too easily," assented the marquis. "And between us, I would not say much about it. How could the law officers help accusing Jacques, if his own mother suspects him?"

The marchioness had taken up the telegram, and was reading it over once more. "And yet," she said, answering her own objections, "who in my place would not have been frightened? This name of Claudieuse especially—"

"What about it? It is the name of an excellent and most honourable gentleman,—the best man in the world, in spite of his sea-dog manners."

"Jacques hates him, my dear."

"Oh, Jacques does not bother himself about him."

"But they have repeatedly quarrelled."

"I dare say. Claudieuse is a furious legitimist; and as such he always talks with the utmost contempt of those who have served the Orleans family."

"Jacques has been at law with him."

"Quite right, too; only he ought to have carried the matter through. Claudieuse lays claims to the Pibole, which divides our lands,—absurd claims. He wants to impede the passage of the water whenever he thinks fit, at the risk of inundating the meadows at Boiscoran, which are lower than his own. Even my brother, who was an angel in patience and gentleness, had his troubles with this tyrant."

The marchioness was still not convinced.

"There was another trouble," she said.

"What?"

"Ah! I should like to know myself."

"Has Jacques hinted at anything?"

"No. All I know is that last year at the Duchess of Champdoce's I met the Countess de Claudieuse and her

children. The young woman is perfectly charming; and, as we were going to give a ball the week after, it occurred to me to invite her at once. She refused, and did so in such an icy, formal manner, that I did not insist."

"She probably does not like dancing," muttered the marquis.

"That same evening I mentioned the matter to Jacques. He seemed very angry, and told me that I had acted very wrongly, and that he had his reasons for not desiring to come in contact with those people."

The marquis considered himself so completely in the right that he only listened with partial attention, looking all the time aside at his precious *faïences*. "Well," he said at last, "Jacques detests the Claudieuse. What does that prove? God be thanked, we do not murder all the people we detest!"

His wife did not insist any further, but only asked, "What must we do?"

She was so little in the habit of consulting her husband that he was quite surprised. "The first thing is to get Jacques out of prison," he answered. "We must see—we ought to ask for advice."

At this moment a light knock was heard at the door, and a servant entered carrying a second telegram which had just arrived. The marquis tore open the envelope. As he glanced at the contents he became extremely pale and cried,—*"Great God!"*

Quick as lightning, the marchioness seized the paper from his hands, and read as follows,—*"Come quick. Jacques in prison; solitary confinement: accused of horrible crime. The whole town says he is guilty, and has confessed. Infamous calumny! His judge is his former friend, Galpin, who was to marry cousin Lavarande. Know nothing, except that Jacques is innocent. Abominable intrigue! Grandpa Chandore and I will do everything possible. Your help indispensable. Come, come!"*

"DENISE DE CHANDORE."

"Ah, my son is lost!" cried the marchioness, with tears in her eyes.

But the marquis had already recovered from the shock. "And I," he exclaimed, "I say more than ever, with Denise, who is a brave girl, that Jacques is innocent. But I see

he is in danger. A criminal prosecution is always an ugly affair. A man in solitary confinement may be made to say anything."

"We must do something," said the mother, nearly mad with grief.

"Yes, and without losing a minute. We have friends let us see who among them can help us."

"I might write to M. de Margeril."

The marquis, already pale, now became livid. "What!" he cried, "you dare utter that name in my presence!"

"He is all powerful; and my son is in danger."

The marquis stopped his wife with a threatening gesture, exclaiming with an accent of bitter hatred,—"I would a thousand times rather my son should die innocent on the scaffold than owe his safety to that man."

The marchioness seemed on the point of fainting. "Good heavens!" she said, "and yet you know very well that I was only indiscreet."

"No more!" said the marquis harshly. Then, recovering his self-control by a powerful effort, he continued,

"Before we attempt anything, we must know how the matter stands. You will leave for Sauveterre this evening."

"Alone?"

"No. I will procure an able lawyer,—a reliable jurist, who is not a politician,—if such a one can be found now-a-days. He will tell you what to do, and will write to me, so that I can do here whatever may be best. Denise is right. Jacques must be the victim of some abominable intrigue. Nevertheless, we shall save him; but we must keep cool, perfectly cool." Saying these words he rang the bell so violently, that a number of servants rushed in at once.

"Quick," cried M. de Boiscoran, "fetch my lawyer, M. Chapelain. Take a carriage." The order was immediately obeyed, and in less than twenty minutes, M. Chapelain arrived.

"Ah! we require all your experience, my friend," said the marquis to him. "Look here. Read these telegrams."

Fortunately, the lawyer had such control over himself, that he did not betray what he felt; for he believed Jacques guilty, knowing how reluctant the public prosecutors generally are to order the arrest of a merely sus-

pected person. "I know the man for the marchioness," he eventually replied, "a young man whose modesty alone has kept him from distinguishing himself so far, although I know he is one of the best jurists at the bar, and an admirable speaker."

"What is his name?"

"Manuel Folgat. I will send him to you at once."

Two hours later, M. Chapelain's protege arrived. He was a man of thirty-one or thirty-two, whose whole appearance was typical of intelligence and energy. He pleased the marquis, who, after having told him all he knew about Jacques's position, gave him a sketch of Sauveterre society, mentioning who would most likely prove friends, and who would remain enemies; recommending him, above all, to trust M. Seneschal, an old friend of the family, and a most influential man.

"Whatever is humanly possible shall be done, sir," said the advocate.

And that same evening, at a quarter-past eight, the Marchioness de Boiscoran and Manuel Folgat took their seats in the train for Sauveterre, via Orleans.

II.

THE Sauveterre railway station is situated some two miles from the town, with which it is connected by a well kept road, having on either side numerous inns and taverns, where on market days the peasants congregate, trying to rob each other with glass in hand, and lips overflowing with protestations of honesty. On week days, even, the road is quite lively, being a favourite promenade. People go to the station to see the trains start or come in, to examine the new arrivals, or to comment upon the motives which have induced M. or Madame So-and-so to travel.

It was nine o'clock in the morning when the train conveying the marchioness and Manuel Folgat at last reached Sauveterre. The former was overcome by fatigue and anxiety, having spent the whole night in discussing the chances in her son's favour. She was all the more exhausted, as the lawyer had taken care not to encourage any extravagant hopes. For he also shared, in secret at least, M. Chapelain's doubts. He, also, had said to himself,

that such a man as M. de Boiscoran is not likely to be arrested, unless there are strong reasons, and almost overwhelming proofs, of his guilt in the hands of the authorities.

The train was slackening speed, as the marchioness remarked, "I hope Denise and her father have thought of sending a carriage to meet us."

"Why so?" asked Manuel Folgat.

"Because I do not wish to be seen, I do not want all the world to see my grief and tears."

The young lawyer shook his head and rejoined, "You will neither keep in hiding, nor exhibit a tearful face, madame, if you are disposed to follow my advice."

The marchioness seemed amazed; but in a few words M. Folgat rapidly pointed out to her what a mistake it would be if she did not show herself, or if she appeared at all downcast in presence of the Sauveterre folks, who would unfailingly attribute her hiding to shame, or consider her grief as significant of a belief in her son's culpability.

The marchioness saw that the advocate was right; so drawing a comb from her dressing-case, she quickly repaired the disorder of her hair; next, with a few skilful touches, she smoothed her dress; her features, by a supreme effort of will, resumed their usual serenity; she forced her lips to smile without betraying the effort it cost her to do so; and finally, in a clear, firm voice, she exclaimed: "Look at me, sir. Can I show myself now?"

The train had just stopped. Manuel Folgat jumped out of the carriage; and, offering the marchioness his hand, to assist her in alighting, he said,—“You will be pleased with yourself, madame. Your courage will not be useless. All Sauveterre seems to be here.”

This was really true. Ever since the night before, a report had been current,—no one knew how it originated,—that the “murderer’s mother,” as they charitably called her, would arrive by the nine o’clock train; and forthwith everybody had determined to be at the station at that hour.

It was not merely public curiosity that dictated this resolution, for public opinion was running strongly against M. de Boiscoran. The fire at Valpinson and the attempt upon the Count de Claudieuse were now looked upon as small matters. But then the fire had had terrible conse-

quences. Two men had perished in it; and two others had been so severely wounded as to be in danger of death. The evening before, a sad procession had passed through the streets of Sauveterre. The almost carbonised remains of Bolton the drummer, and of poor Guillebault, had been brought home in a cart covered with a black cloth, and followed by two priests. The whole town, moreover, had seen the widow go to the mayor's office, holding her youngest child in her arms, while the four others clung to her dress. All these misfortunes were traced back to Jacques, who was loaded with curses; and people now thought of manifesting their resentment by receiving his mother, the marchioness, in a hostile manner.

"There she is, there she is!" exclaimed the crowd, as she appeared on the threshold of the station, leaning upon M. Folgat's arm.

Not another word, however, was uttered, so great was every one's surprise at her assured mien. "She puts a bold face on it," said some, while others declared, "She is convinced of her son's innocence."

At all events, she had presence of mind enough to see what an impression she produced, and how well she had done to follow M. Folgat's advice. It gave her additional strength. On perceiving in the crowd some people she knew, she at once went up to them, and with a smile exclaimed, "Well, of course, you know what has happened to us. It is unheard of! Here is the liberty of a man like my son at the mercy of the first foolish notion that enters a magistrate's head. I heard the news yesterday by telegram, and came down at once with this gentleman a friend of ours, and one of the first advocates in Paris.

M. Folgat knit his brows; he would have liked the marchioness to measure her words. Still he was bound to support her.

"These gentlemen of the court," he said in measured tones, "will perhaps be sorry for what they have done."

Fortunately a young man, wearing a gold-laced cap, came up to them at this moment, announcing that M. de Chandore's carriage was waiting.

"Very well," replied the marchioness. And bowing to the good people of Sauveterre, who were quite dumbfounded by her assurance, she added: "Pardon me if I leave you so soon; but M. de Chandore expects us. I

shall, however, be happy to call upon you soon on my son's arm."

The Chandore family reside on the other side of the Place du Marche Neuf, in a large, massive, ugly, modern house, having a conical-capped corner tower, which Dr. Seignebos had described as threatening Sauveterre with a revival of the feudal system. It is true the Chandores were once upon a time great feudal lords, exhibiting both a profound contempt for all who could not boast of noble ancestors and a deep hatred of revolutionary ideas. But, if they had ever been formidable, they had long since ceased to be so. Of this once greater and numerous family, only one member survived, the old Baron de Chandore, and his granddaughter, Jacques de Boiscoran's promised bride, Denise, was an orphan. She was barely three years old, when, within five months, she lost her father, killed in a duel, and her mother, who had not the strength to survive the man she loved. This was certainly a terrible misfortune; but the little one was not left uncared for, nor unloved. Her grandfather bestowed all his affection upon her; and her mother's two sisters, the Demoiselles de Lavarande, determined never to marry, so as to devote themselves exclusively to their niece, and with this object in view, they suggested to the baron that they should live with him and his little grandchild; but he persistently refused to listen to their propositions, asserting that he was quite competent to look after Denise, and adding that he wished to have her all to himself. All he would grant was, that the ladies might spend the day with Denise whenever they chose.

Hence arose a certain rivalry between the aunts and the grandfather, each being eager to win the affections of the little girl at any price. At five years of age Denise had every toy that had ever been invented. At ten she was dressed like the first lady of the land, and possessed jewellery in abundance.

Her grandfather, formerly rough, rigid and severe, had been metamorphosed from head to foot. The fierce look had vanished from his eyes, the scorn from his lips giving place to soft glances and smooth words. He might be seen every day hurrying along the streets, and going from shop to shop on errands for his grandchild. He invited her little friends, arranged children's parties, taught her to

drive her hoop, and willingly took part in all her games. If Denise was out of sorts, he trembled. If she coughed, he turned pale. Once she was really ill, having caught the measles. He stayed up for twelve nights in succession, and sent to Paris for famous doctors, who laughed in his face.

And yet the two old ladies found means to exceed his folly. If Denise learned anything at all, it was only because she herself insisted upon it, otherwise the writing-master and the music-master would have been sent away at the slightest sign of weariness.

Sauveterre shrugged its shoulders at this spectacle. "What a wretched education!" said the ladies of the town. "Such weakness is absolutely unheard of. The child's relatives are rendering her a sorry service."

No doubt this almost incredible spoiling, blind devotion, and perpetual worship, might have made Denise the most disagreeable little person that ever lived. But fortunately she had one of those happy dispositions which cannot be perverted; and besides, she was perhaps saved from the danger by its very excess. As she grew older, she would say with a laugh,—“Grandpapa Chandore, my aunts Lavarande, and I, we do just what we choose.” This, however, was only a joke. Never did a young girl repay such intense affection with rarer and nobler qualities.

She was leading a happy life, free from all care, being just seventeen years old, when a great event occurred. One morning, M. de Chandore met Jacques de Boiscoran, whose uncle had been a friend of his, and invited him to dinner. Jacques accepted the invitation, and came. Denise saw him, and loved him at once. Now, for the first time in her life, she had a secret unknown to Grandpapa Chandore and to her aunts; and for two years the birds and the flowers were the only confidants of this love of hers, which grew up in her heart, sweet like a dream, idealised by absence, and fed by memory. For Jacques's eyes remained blind during two years. But on the day when they were opened he felt that his fate was sealed. Nor did he hesitate a moment; and in less than a month afterward, the Marquis de Boiscoran came to Sauveterre, and with all due form asked Denise's hand for his son.

Ah! it was a heavy blow for Grandpapa Chandore. He had, of course, often thought of his grandchild's future mar-

riage, he had even at times spoken of it, and told her that he was getting old, and should feel very much relieved, when he had found her a good husband. But he talked of the matter as a distant thing, very much as we speak of dying. M. de Boiscoran's application revealed the true nature of his feelings. He shuddered at the idea of no longer living with Denise, of seeing her prefer another man to himself, and of loving her children best of all. He was indeed quite inclined to throw the envoy out of the window. Still he checked his feelings and replied that he could give no reply till he had consulted his granddaughter.

Poor grandpapa ! At the very first words he uttered, she exclaimed,—“ Oh, I am so happy ! But I expected it.”

M. de Chandore bent his head to conceal a tear which burned in his eyes. “ Then the thing is settled,” he murmured.

Soon comforted by the joy that was sparkling in his grandchild's eyes, he began reproaching himself for his selfishness, and for being unhappy when Denise showed no signs of grief. Jacques was of course allowed to visit the house, and pay his court ; and on the very day before the fire at Valpinson, the date of the wedding had been finally fixed.

Thus Denise was in the very height of happiness, when she suddenly heard of the terrible charges brought against M. de Boiscoran, and of his arrest. Overwhelmed by the news, gently broken as it was, she had lain nearly ten minutes unconscious in her aunt's arms. The good ladies, like her grandfather, were themselves utterly overcome with terror. Denise's despair only lasted, however, the space of a fainting fit, for as she came to, she exclaimed :—“ Am I mad to give way thus ? Is it not evident he is innocent ? ”

First she sent a telegram to the marquis, knowing that, before taking any steps, it was all important to come to an understanding with Jacques's family. Then she begged to be left alone ; and spent the night in counting the minutes that must pass till the help she hoped for arrived by the train from Paris.

At eight o'clock she came down stairs and gave orders that a carriage should be sent to the station for the marchioness, adding that the coachman must drive back as fast as possible. Then she joined her grandfather and her

aunts in the drawing room. It was in vain, however, that they talked to her ; for her thoughts were elsewhere.

At last a rumble of wheels and the clatter of horses' hoofs was heard. The Chandore carriage halted before the house. Quick as lightning, Denise arose, and rushing into the hall, exclaimed,—

“ Here is Jacques's mother ! ”

III.

WE cannot do violence to our natural feelings with impunity. The marchioness was utterly overcome by the great effort she had made to meet the curious people of Sauveterre with a smiling face and calm features.

“ What a horrible comedy,” she murmured as she sank back on the cushions of the carriage sent to fetch her.

“ Admit, at least, madame,” said the lawyer, “ that it was necessary. You have won over, perhaps, a hundred persons to your son's side.”

Hardly had the carriage stopped before M. de Chandore's residence, than the house-door opened, and Denise threw herself into the marchioness's arms, too deeply moved to speak. At last she broke forth, “ Oh, my mother, my mother ! what a terrible misfortune ! ”

M. de Chandore, who had rejoined his granddaughter quickly, drew her and the marchioness into the drawing-room. Poor M. Folgat was sorely embarrassed what to do with himself. No one seemed to be aware of his existence. He followed the others, however, entering the room, and standing by the door, he looked by turns at Denise, M. de Chandore, and the two spinsters.

Denise was then twenty years old. It could not be said that she was uncommonly beautiful ; but no one who had once seen her could ever forget her again. Though small in form, she was grace personified ; and all her movements were exquisitely perfect. Her black hair contrasted strangely with her blue eyes and fair complexion. Her skin was indeed of dazzling whiteness. Her features suggested angelic goodness of mind, and at the same time excessive timidity. And yet, from certain movements of her lips and her eyebrows, one might have suspected no lack of energy.

By her side Grandpapa Chandore looked unusually tall and imposing. He did not show his seventy-two years, but was as straight as ever, and seemed built to defy all the storms of life. What struck strangers most, perhaps, was his ruddy brown complexion, which gave him the appearance of an Indian chieftain, being all the more prominent owing to his white beard and hair. Although his features usually wore an air of benevolence, a glance at his eyes showed that the gentle smile on his lips was not to be taken alone. There were flashes in those gray eyes which made people aware that a man who dared, for instance, to offend Denise, would have to pay for it pretty dearly.

As to the two aunts, the Demoiselles de Lavarande, they were as tall and thin as a couple of willow-rods, pale, discreet, ultra-aristocratic in their reserve and their coldness; but they bore in their faces an expression of happy peace and sentimental tenderness, such as is often seen in old maids whose temper has not been soured by celibacy. They dressed absolutely alike, as they had done now for forty years, preferring neutral colours and modest fashions, such as suited their simple taste.

They were crying bitterly when the party entered the drawing-room; and M. Folgat felt instinctively that they were capable of any sacrifice for their beloved niece's sake. "Poor Denise!" they whispered.

The girl heard them, and drawing herself up, exclaimed:—"We are behaving shamefully. What would Jacques say, if he could see us from his prison? Why should we be so sad? Is he not innocent?" Her eyes shone with unusual brilliancy, and her voice had a ring which moved Manual Folgat deeply.

"I can at least, in justice to myself," she continued, "assure you that I have never doubted him for a moment. And how should I ever have dared to doubt? The very night on which the fire broke out, Jacques wrote me a letter of four pages, which he sent me by one of his tenants and which reached me at nine o'clock. I showed it to grandpapa. He read it, and said I was a thousand times right, because a man who had been meditating such a crime could never have written that letter."

"I said so, and I still think so," added M. de Chandore; "and every sensible man will think so too; but—"

His granddaughter did not let him finish. "It is evident,

therefore," said she, "that Jacques is the victim of an abominable intrigue; and we must unravel it. We have cried enough: now let us act!"

Then, turning to the marchioness she added, "And my dear mother, I sent for you, because we want you to help us in this great work."

"And here I am," replied the old lady, "not less certain of my son's innocence than you are."

Evidently M. de Chandore had been hoping for something more; for he interrupted her, asking, "And the marquis?"

"My husband remained in Paris."

The old gentleman's face assumed a curious expression. "Ah, that is just like him," he said. "Nothing can move him. His only son is wickedly accused of a crime, arrested, and thrown into prison. He is informed of it; it is hoped he will come at once. By no means. Let his son get out of trouble as he can. He has his *faïences* to attend to. Oh, if I had a son!"

"My husband," pleaded the marchioness, "thinks he can be more useful to Jacques in Paris than here. There will be much to be done there."

"Haven't we the railway?"

"Moreover," she resumed, not answering the query, "he intrusted me to this gentleman, M. Manuel Folgat, who has promised us the assistance of his experience, his talents, and his devotion."

So saying the marchioness pointed to the advocate, who, being thus formally introduced, bowed and said, "I am all hope. But I think, with Mademoiselle de Chandore, that we must go to work without losing a second. Before I can decide, however, upon what is to be done, I must know all the facts."

"Unfortunately we know nothing," replied M. de Chandore, "nothing, except that Jacques is kept in close confinement."

"Well, then, we must try to find out. You know, no doubt, all the law officers of Sauveterre?"

"Very few. I know the public prosecutor."

"And the investigating magistrate?"

At these words the elder of the Demoiselles Lavarande rose, exclaiming, "That man, M. Galpin-Daveline, is a monster of hypocrisy and ingratitude. He called himself

Jacques's friend ; and Jacques liked him well enough to induce us, my sister and myself, to give our consent to a marriage between him and one of our cousins, a Lavarande. Poor child ! When she learned the sad truth, she cried, ' God be blessed that I escaped the disgrace of becoming the wife of such a man ! ' "

" Yes," added the other old lady, " if all Sauveterre thinks Jacques guilty, it is because his own friend has become his judge."

M. Folgat shook his head, and said, " I must have more minute information. The marquis mentioned to me a M. Seneschal, who is mayor of Sauveterre."

M. de Chandore looked at once for his hat, exclaiming, " To be sure ! He is a friend of ours ; and, if any one is well informed, he is. Let us go to him. Come ! "

M. Seneschal was indeed a friend of the Chandores, the Lavarandes, and also of the Boiscorans, whose confidential adviser he had been for more than twenty years, and to whom he had naturally become attached after so long a connection. It was in a measure, thanks to the protection of these families, that eventually he had become mayor of Sauveterre and member of the departmental general council.

He was well-nigh overcome with fatigue and anxiety when he returned to Sauveterre on the morning after the fatal fire at Valpinson. Still he had to discharge numerous and troublesome duties, which left him no time for rest or for dwelling on painful reflections. He had to provide for the recovery and removal of the remains of the two unfortunate victims of the fire ; he had to receive the mother of one, and the widow and children of the other, and to listen to their complaints, and try to console them by promising the former a small pension, and the latter some help in the education of her children. Then he had to give directions to have the wounded men brought home : and afterwards to go in search of a house for the Count de Claudieuse and his wife, a matter which had given him much trouble. Finally, a large part of the afternoon was taken up by an angry discussion with Dr. Seignebos. The doctor, in the name of " outraged society," in the name of justice and humanity, demanded the immediate arrest of Cocoleu, the wretch whose unconscious statement formed the basis of the accusation against

M. de Boiscoran. He demanded with a furious oath that the epileptic idiot should be sent to the hospital, and kept there so as to be professionally examined by experts. The mayor for some time refused to grant the request, which seemed to him unreasonable; but the doctor talked so loud, and insisted so strongly, that at last two gendarmes were sent to Brechy with orders to bring Cocoleu to Sauveterre.

They returned several hours later with empty hands. The idiot had disappeared; and no one in the whole district had been able to give any information as to his whereabouts.

"And do you think that natural?" asked Dr. Seignebos, whose eyes were glaring at the mayor from under his spectacles. "To me it looks like an absolute proof that a plot has been hatched to ruin M. de Boiscoran."

"But can't you be quiet?" said M. Seneschal angrily. "Do you think Cocoleu lost? He will turn up again, sure enough."

The doctor left without insisting any further; but, before going home, he dropped in at his club, and in the presence of twenty people, declared he had positive proof of a plot formed against M. de Boiscoran, whom the Monarchists had never forgiven for having left them; adding that the Jesuits were certainly mixed up in the business.

This interference was more injurious than useful to Jacques, as was soon apparent. That same evening, when M. Galpin crossed the Place du Marche Neuf, he was wantonly insulted. Naturally enough he hurried to the mayor, reproaching him and holding him responsible for this insult offered to justice in his person, and asking for energetic punishment. M. Seneschal promised to take the proper measures, and hastened to the office of the public prosecutor to act in concert with him. Then it was that he learnt what had happened at Boiscoran, and the terrible result of Jacques's examination.

Distressed at M. de Boiscoran's situation, he spent a bad night, and in the morning displayed such fearful temper that his wife hardly dared to say a word to him. There was more to come, however. At two o'clock precisely, Bolton and Guillebault's funeral was to take place and he had promised Captain Parenteau to be present in his

official costume, and accompanied by the whole municipal council. He had just given orders to have his uniform got ready, when a servant announced visitors—"M. de Chandore and a friend."

"That was all that was wanting!" exclaimed the distracted mayor. But after a pause he added, "Well, it had to come sooner or later. Show them in!"

M. Seneschal expected a heart-rending scene, and consequently he was amazed at the easy, almost cheerful manner with which M. de Chandore introduced his companion.

"M. Manuel Folgat, my dear Seneschal, a famous lawyer from Paris, who has been kind enough to come down with the Marchioness de Boiscoran."

"I am a stranger here, M. Seneschal," said Folgat; "I do not know the manner of thinking, the customs, the interests, the prejudices, of the province; in fact, I am totally ignorant, and I know I should commit many a grievous blunder, unless I secured the assistance of an able and experienced counsellor. M. de Boiscoran and M. de Chandore have both encouraged me in the hope that I might find such a man in you."

"Certainly, sir, and with all my heart," replied M. Seneschal, bowing politely, and evidently flattered by this deference on the part of the Parisian advocate.

He offered seats, and then sat down himself, resting his elbow on the arm of his big office-chair, and rubbing his clean-shaven chin with his hand. "This is a very serious matter, gentlemen," he said at last.

"A criminal charge is always serious," replied M. Folgat.

"Upon my word," cried M. de Chandore, "you are not in doubt about Jacques's innocence?"

M. Seneschal did not answer at first; but after a pause he remarked: "How can we know what may be going on in the young brains of five and twenty when they are set on fire by the remembrance of certain insults; wrath is a dangerous counsellor."

Grandpapa Chandore refused to hear any more. "What! do you talk to me of wrath?" he broke in. "What do you see of wrath in this Valpinson affair? I see nothing in it, for my part, but the meanest crime—a crime long prepared and coolly carried out."

The mayor shook his head, and replied—"You do not know all that has happened."

"Sir," added M. Folgat, "it is precisely for the purpose of hearing what has happened that we come to you."

"So be it," said M. Seneschal, who thereupon went to work to describe the events he had himself witnessed at Valpinson, and those which had taken place at Boiscoran, as described by the public prosecutor; he did this with all the lucidity of an experienced old lawyer, accustomed to unravel the mysteries of complicated suits. He wound up at length by saying—"Finally, do you know what Daubigeon said to me? He said, 'Galpin was obliged to order M. de Boiscoran's arrest. Is he guilty? I don't know what to think of it. The accusation is overwhelming. He swears by all the gods that he is innocent, but he will not tell us how he spent the night.'"

M. de Chandore, robust as he was, nearly fainted; albeit his face remained as crimson as ever. Nothing on earth could make him turn pale. "My God!" he murmured, "what will Denise say?" Then, turning to M. Folgat, he said aloud—"And yet Jacques had something on his mind that evening."

"Do you think so?"

"I am sure of it. But for that, he would certainly have come to the house, as he has done every evening for a month. Besides, he said so himself in the letter which he sent Denise by one of his tenants, and which she mentioned to you. He wrote, 'I curse from the bottom of my heart the business which prevents me from spending the evening with you; but I cannot possibly defer it any longer.'"

"You see!" cried M. Seneschal.

"The letter is, however, of such a nature," continued the old gentleman, "that I repeat, no man who premeditated such a hideous crime could possibly have written it. Nevertheless, I confess, that, when I heard the fatal news, this very allusion to some pressing business impressed me painfully."

The young lawyer seemed far from being convinced. "It is evident," he said, "that M. de Boiscoran will on no account tell us where he went."

"He told a falsehood, sir," insisted M. Seneschal. "He commenced by denying that he had gone where the witnesses met him."

"Very naturally, since he desired to keep his destination unknown."

"He did not say anything more when he was told he was under arrest."

"Because he hoped to get out of this trouble without betraying his secret."

"If that were so, it would be very strange."

"Stranger things than that have happened."

"To allow himself to be accused of incendiarism and murder when he is innocent!"

"To be innocent, and to allow one's self to be condemned, is still stranger; and yet there are instances—"

The young lawyer spoke in that short, imperious tone which is, so to say, the privilege of his profession, and with such an accent of assurance, that M. de Chandore felt his hopes revive. M. Seneschal was sorely troubled. "And what do you think, sir?" he asked.

"That M. de Boiscoran must be innocent," replied the young advocate. And without leaving time for objections, he continued,—

"That is the opinion of a man who is not influenced by any personal consideration. I come here without any preconceived notions. I do not know the Count de Claudieuse any more than I know M. de Boiscoran. A crime has been committed; I am told the circumstances; and I at once come to the conclusion that the reasons which led to the arrest of the accused would lead me to set him at liberty."

"Oh!"

"Let me explain. If M. de Boiscoran is guilty, he showed by the way in which he received M. Galpin at his house, a perfectly unheard of self-control, together with a matchless genius for comedy. Therefore, if he is guilty, he is immensely clever—"

"But—"

"Allow me. Still supposing him to be guilty, he showed a marvellous want of self-control, and to be brief, immeasurable stupidity during his subsequent examination: therefore if he is guilty, he is also immensely stupid—"

"But—"

"Allow me to finish. Can one and the same person be at once so unusually clever and so unusually stupid? Judge yourself. But again: if M. de Boiscoran is guilty,

he ought to be sent to the insane asylum, and not to prison; for who but a madman would not have poured away the dirty water in which he had washed his blackened hands? Mad indeed must he be not to have concealed that famous breech-loader, of which the prosecution now makes such good use."

"Jacques is safe!" exclaimed M. de Chandore.

M. Seneschal was not so easily won over. "That is specious pleading," he said. "Unfortunately, we want something more than a logical conclusion to encounter a jury who will be beset with an abundance of witnesses on the other side."

"We shall find more on our side."

"What do you propose to do?"

"I don't know. I have just told you my first impression. Now I must study the case, and examine the witnesses, beginning with old Anthony."

M. de Chandore had risen. "We can reach Boiscoran in an hour," he said. "Shall I send for my carriage?"

The young advocate nodded assent, and a quarter of an hour later, the pair were driving along the highroad in the direction of Jacques's chateau.

IV.

IF M. Seneschal's horse was one of the best in the whole province, M. de Chandore's was still better. In less than fifty minutes, during which M. de Chandore and M. Folgat did not exchange fifty words, they reached Boiscoran, where they found the court-yard silent and deserted. Doors and windows alike were hermetically closed. On the steps of the porch, however, there sat a stout young peasant, who, at the sight of the new-comers, rose, and carried his hand to his cap.

"Where is Anthony?" asked M. de Chandore.

"Up stairs, sir."

The old gentleman tried to open the door: it resisted.

"Oh, sir! I forgot. Anthony has barricaded the door from the inside."

"A curious idea," said M. de Chandore, knocking with the butt-end of his whip. He had to knock harder and

harder before Anthony's voice was heard asking from within, "Who is there?"

"It is I, the Baron de Chandore."

The bars were removed instantly, and the old valet appeared on the threshold. He looked pale and dejected. The disordered condition of his beard, hair, and dress, showed that he had not been to bed.

M. de Chandore was so struck that he exclaimed, "What is the matter with you, my good Anthony?"

Instead of replying, Anthony drew the baron and his companion inside. When he had refastened the door, he crossed his arms, and said,—“The matter is—well, I am afraid.”

The old gentleman and the lawyer looked at each other. They evidently both thought the poor man had lost his mind. Anthony saw it, and said quickly,—“No, I am not mad, although, certainly, there are things passing here which could make one doubt one's own senses. If I am afraid, it is for good reasons.”

“You do not doubt your master?” asked M. Folgat.

The servant cast such fierce, threatening glances at the lawyer, that M. de Chandore hastened to interfere. “My dear Anthony,” he said, “this gentleman is a friend of mine, a lawyer, who has come down from Paris with the marchioness to defend Jacques. You need not mistrust him, nay, more than that, you must tell him all you know, even if—”

The trusty old servant's face brightened up, as he exclaimed,—“Ah! the gentleman is a lawyer. Welcome, sir. Now I can say all that weighs on my heart. No, most assuredly I do not think M. Jacques guilty. It is impossible he should be so: it is absurd to think of it. But what I do believe, what I am sure of, is, that there is a plot to charge him with all the horrors perpetrated at Valpinson.”

“A plot?” broke in M. Folgat, “whose? how? what for?”

“Ah! that is more than I know. But I am not mistaken; and you would think so too, if you had been present at the examination, as I was. It was fearful, gentlemen, it was so unbearable, that I was stupefied for a moment, and even thought my master guilty, and advised him to flee. The like has never been heard of before I am sure.”

Everything went against him. Every answer he made sounded like a confession."

In broken words Anthony next related the various phases of Jaques's examination. As soon as he paused, M. de Chandore hastily exclaimed, "Why did you not come and tell me all that immediately?"

The old servant ventured to shrug his shoulders slightly, and replied, "How could I? When the examination was over, that man, Galpin, put the seals everywhere,—strips of linen fastened on with sealing-wax, as they do with dead people. He put one on every door and window, and on some of them two. He put three on the outer door. Then he told me that he appointed me keeper of the house, that I should be paid for it, but that I should be sent to the galleys if any one touched the seals even with the tip of a finger. When he had handed master over to the gendarmes, that man, Galpin, went away, leaving me here alone, dumbfounded, like a fellow who has been knocked on the head. Nevertheless, I should have come to you, sir, but I had an idea that gave me the shivers."

Grandpapa Chandore stamped his foot and cried, "Come to the point, to the point!"

"It was this: you must know, gentlemen, that, in the examination, that breechloading gun played a prominent part. Galpin looked at it carefully, and asked master when he had last fired it off. Master said, 'About five days ago.' You hear, I say, five days. Thereupon, that man, Galpin, puts the gun down, without looking at the barrels."

"Well?" asked M. Folgat.

"Well, sir, I—Anthony—I had the evening before—I say the evening before—cleaned the gun, washed it, and—"

"Upon my word," cried M. de Chandore, "why did you not say so at once? If the barrels are clean, that is an absolute proof that Jacques is innocent."

The old servant shook his head, and said,—“To be sure, sir. But are they clean?”

"Oh!"

"Master may be mistaken as to the time when he last fired the gun, and then the barrels would be soiled; and, instead of helping him, my evidence might ruin him definitely. Before I say anything I ought to be sure."

"Yes," said Folgat, approvingly, "and you have done

well to keep silence, my good man. I cannot urge you too earnestly not to say a word of the matter to any one. That fact may become a decisive argument for the defence."

"Oh! I can hold my tongue, sir. Only you may imagine how impatient I have been with these confounded seals which prevent me from looking at the gun. Oh, if I had dared to break one of them!"

"Poor fellow!"

"I thought of doing it; but I checked myself. Then it occurred to me that other people might think of the same thing. The rascals who had formed this abominable plot against M. Jacques are capable of anything, don't you think so? Why might not they come some night, and break the seals? I put the steward on guard in the garden, under the windows. I put his son as a sentinel in the courtyard; and I have myself stood watch before the seals with arms in my hands all the time. Let the rascals come on, they will find somebody to receive them."

Hour by hour since his arrival at Sauveterre, M. Folgat's faith in Jacques's innocence had steadily increased, and old Anthony's tale was not calculated to shake his growing conviction. He did not admit the existence of a plot, however; though he was not disinclined to believe in the cunning calculations of some rascal, who, availing himself of circumstances known to him alone, had managed to let suspicion fall upon M. de Boiscoran, instead of on himself.

There were many other questions to be asked; but Anthony was in such a state of feverish excitement, that it was difficult to induce him to answer. However, after a moment's pause, M. Folgat began once more, saying,—
"My good Anthony, I cannot praise your conduct in this matter too highly. However, we have not done with it yet. But I have eaten nothing since I left Paris last night, and I hear the bell strike twelve o'clock—"

M. de Chandore seemed heartily ashamed, and broke in with profuse excuses for his neglect. At the same time Anthony turned away with the view of having a *dejeuner* prepared, and after a brief interval invited the visitors to enter the dining-room, where the cloth was laid.

The two gentlemen had taken their seats, and old Anthony had placed himself, napkin in hand, behind them;

when M. de Chandore exclaimed,—“Put another plate Anthony, and breakfast with us.”

“Oh, sir,” protested the old servant,—“sir—”

“Sit, down,” repeated the baron: “if you eat after us you will make us lose time, and an old servant like you is a member of the family.”

Anthony obeyed, quite overcome, but blushing with delight at the honour that was done him: for the Baron de Chandore did not usually distinguish himself by familiarity. When the ham and eggs prepared by the housekeeper had been disposed of, M. Folgat remarked:—“Now let us go back to business. Keep cool, my dear Anthony, and remember that unless we get the prosecution office to say there is no case, your answers may become the basis of our defence at the trial. What were M. de Boiscoran’s habits when he was here?”

“When he was here, sir, he had, so to say, no habits. We came here very rarely, and only for a short time.”

“Never mind; what did he do here?”

“He used to rise late; he walked about a good deal; sometimes he went out shooting; he sketched; he read, for master is a great reader, and is as fond of his books as the marquise, his father, is of his porcelain.”

“Who came here to see him?”

“M. Galpin-Daveline most frequently, Dr. Seignebois, the priest from Brechy, M. Seneschal, and M. Daubigeon.”

“How did he spend his evenings?”

“At M. de Chandore’s who can tell you all about them.”

“He had no other relatives in the neighbourhood?”

“No.”

“You do not know if he had any lady friend?”

Anthony looked as if he would have blushed. “Oh sir,” he said, “you don’t know, I presume, that master is engaged to Mademoiselle Denise?”

The Baron de Chandore was not a baby, as he himself was wont to say. Albeit deeply interested, he rose and said, “I feel the want of a little fresh air.” A minute later he had left the room, understanding very well that the fact of his being Denise’s grandfather might keep Anthony from telling the truth.

“That is a sensible man,” thought M. Folgat, adding aloud:—“Now we are alone, my dear Anthony, you can speak frankly. Did M. de Boiscoran keep a mistress?”

"No, sir."

"Did he ever have one?"

"Never. They will tell you, perhaps, that once upon a time he was partial to a great, big red-haired woman, the daughter of a miller in the neighbourhood, and that she came more frequently to the chateau than was needful,—now on one pretext, and now on another. But that was mere child's play. Besides, that was five years ago, and the woman has been married these three years to a basket-maker at Marennes."

"You are quite sure of what you say?"

"As sure as I am of myself. And you would be as sure of it yourself, if you knew the country as I know it, and the abominable tongues the people have. There is no concealing anything from them. I defy a man to talk three times to a woman without their finding it out and concocting some scandal. I say nothing of Paris—"

M. Folgat, who had listened attentively, at once asked,—*"Ah! was there anything of the kind in Paris?"*

Anthony hesitated; at last he said,—*"You see, master's secrets are not mine, and, after the oath I have sworn—"*

"It may be, however, that his safety depends upon your frankness in telling me everything," said the lawyer. *"You may be sure he will not blame you for having spoken."*

During a brief interval the old servant remained seemingly undecided; but eventually he remarked,—*"It is said that master had a great love affair."*

"When?"

"I don't know. It was before I entered his service. All I know is that, for the purpose of meeting the person he loved, master bought a beautiful house at Passy, at the end of the Rue des Vignes. It stood in a large garden, and he furnished it magnificently."

"Ah!"

"It was a secret, of course, and neither master's father nor his mother knows it to this day; and I only know it, because one day master fell down the steps and dislocated his foot, so that he had to send for me to nurse him. He may have bought the house under his own name; but he was not known by it there. He passed for an Englishman, a Mr. Burnett; and he had an English maid servant,"

"And the person who met them there?"

"Ah, sir! I not only don't know who she is, but I can't even guess. She took such extraordinary precautions! As I mean to tell you everything, I will confess to you that I had the curiosity to question the English servant. She told me that she knew no farther than I did; that she knew, to be sure, that a lady came there from time to time; but she had never seen even the end of her nose. Master so managed it that the girl was invariably out on some errand or other when the lady came and when she went away. While she was in the house, master waited upon her himself. And when they wanted to walk in the garden, they sent the servant away on some fool's errand to Versailles or Fontainebleau; and she was in a rage I can tell you."

M. Folgat began to twirl his beard, as he was in the habit of doing when specially interested. For a moment he thought he saw the woman,—the inevitable woman who is always at the bottom of every great event in a man's life; but then she vanished from his sight; and he tortured his mind in vain to discover a possible if not probable connection between the mysterious visitor to the house in the Rue des Vignes, and the events that had happened at Valpinson. He could not see a trace. Accordingly, rather discouraged, he asked once more, "After all, my dear Anthony, this great love affair of your master's has come to an end?"

"It seems so, sir, since M. Jacques was going to marry Mademoiselle Denise."

The reason was perhaps not quite as conclusive as the old servant imagined; still the young advocate made no remark on the point, merely asking, "And when do you think it came to an end?"

"During the war, master and the lady must have parted, for master did not stay in Paris. He commanded a company of *mobiles*; and after being wounded in the head, obtained the cross."

"Does he still own the house in the Rue des Vignes?"

"I believe so."

"Why?"

"Because, some time ago, when master and I went to Paris for a week, he said to me one day, 'The war and the commune have cost me dear. My shanty has been struck by more than twenty shells, and it has been occupied by

Francs-tireurs, Communists, and Regulars. The walls are pierced, and there is not a piece of furniture uninjured. My architect tells me, that, all in all, the repairs will cost some forty thousand francs.’”

“What? Repairs? Then he thought of going back there?”

“At that time, sir, master’s marriage was not settled.”

“Still that would go to prove that he had met the mysterious lady once more, and that the war had not broken off their relations.”

“That may be.”

“And has he never mentioned the lady since?”

“Never.”

At this moment M. de Chandore’s cough was heard in the hall, a cough such as men affect when they wish to announce their coming. A minute later he re-appeared, M. Folgat remarking, to show that his presence was no longer inconvenient, “Upon my word, sir, I was just going in search of you, for fear that you really felt unwell.”

“Thank you,” replied the old gentleman, “the fresh air has done me good.”

He sat down, and the young advocate turned again to Anthony, saying, “Well, let us go on. How was he the day before the fire?”

“Just as usual.”

“What did he do before he went out?”

“He dined as usual with a good appetite; then he went up stairs, and remained there for an hour. When he came down, he had a letter in his hand, which he gave to Michael, our tenant’s son, telling him to carry it to Sauverre to Mademoiselle de Chandore.”

“Yes, that was so, and in that letter M. de Boiscoran told Mademoiselle Denise that he was detained here by a matter of great importance.”

“Ah!”

“Have you any idea what that could have been?”

“Not the least, sir, I assure you.”

“Yet let us see. M. de Boiscoran must have had powerful reasons to deprive himself of the pleasure of spending the evening with Mademoiselle Denise?”

“Yes, indeed.”

“He must also have had his reasons for taking to the

marshes, on his way out, instead of going by the turnpike, and also for coming back through the woods."

Old Anthony literally tore at his hair as he exclaimed, "Ah, sir! these are the very words M. Galpin said."

"Unfortunately, every man in his senses will say so."

"I know it, sir: I know it but too well. And M. Jacques himself knew it so well that at first he tried to find some pretext; but he has never told a falsehood—M. Jacques can't tell a falsehood. And clever as he is, he could not find a pretext that had any sense in it. He said he had gone to Brechy to see his wood-merchant."

"And why shouldn't he?"

Anthony shook his head and replied, "Because the wood-merchant at Brechy is a thief, and everybody knows that master kicked him out of the house some three years ago. We sell all our wood at Sauveterre."

M. Folgat had taken out a note-book, in which he wrote down some of Anthony's statements, preparing thus the outline of his defence. This being done, he resumed again. "Now we come to Cocoleu," said he.

"Ah, the wretch!" cried Anthony.

"You know him?"

"How could I help knowing him, having lived all my life here at Boiscoran in the service of master's uncle?"

"Then what kind of a man is he?"

"An idiot, sir, or, as they here call it an '*innocent*,' who has Saint Vitus's dance into the bargain, and epilepsy moreover."

"Then it is perfectly notorious that he is imbecile?"

"Yes, sir, although I have heard people insist that he is not quite so stupid as he looks, and that, as they say here, he plays the ass in order to get his oats—"

At this point M. de Chandore exclaimed, "On this subject Dr. Seignebos can give you all the information you may want: he kept Cocoleu for nearly two years at his own house."

"I mean to see the doctor," replied M. Folgar. "But first of all we must find this unfortunate idiot."

"You heard what M. Seneschal said: he has put the gendarmes on his track."

"Oh," exclaimed Anthony, "if the gendarmes have taken Cocoleu, he must have given himself up voluntarily."

"Why?"

"Because there is no one who knows the by-paths and out-of-the-way corners of the country so well as that idiot; for he has been hiding all his life like a savage in the holes and thickets of the district; and as he can live well enough on roots and berries, maybe he will stay away three months without being seen by any one."

"Is it possible?" exclaimed M. Folgat angrily.

"I only know one man," continued Anthony, "capable of finding Cocoleu—our tenant's son, Michael—the young man you saw down-stairs."

"Send for him," said M. de Chandore.

Michael appeared promptly, and, when acquainted with what he was expected to do, replied; "The thing can be managed, certainly, though not very easily. Cocoleu hasn't a man's sense, but the instincts of a brute. However, I'll try."

There was nothing to keep either M. de Chandore or M. Folgat any longer at Boiscoran; and accordingly they left the chateau, after warning Anthony to watch the seals well, and to get a glimpse, if possible, of Jacques's gun; when the offices came for the different articles required by the prosecution. It was five o'clock when the pair drove into town again. Denise was waiting for them in the drawing-room. She rose as they entered, looking quite pale, her eyes being dry and brilliant.

"What! You are alone here?" said M. de Chandore. "Why have they left you alone?"

"Don't be angry, grandpapa. I have just prevailed on the marchioness, who was exhausted with fatigue, to lie down for an hour or so before dinner."

"And your aunts?"

"They have gone out, grandpapa. They are probably by this time at M. Galpin-Daveline's."

M. Folgat started, giving vent to an exclamation of surprise.

"It is a foolish step!" exclaimed the old gentleman; but Denise closed his lips with a single phrase.

"I asked them to go," she said.

V.

YES, the step taken by the Demoiselles de Lavarande was foolish. At this point of affairs their visit to M. Galpin might perhaps supply him with the means to crush Jacques. Still it was M. de Chandore's and M. Folgat's joint fault. Had they not left Sauveterre without any other precaution than sending word through M. Seneschal's servant, that they would be in for dinner, and that Denise, her aunts, and Jacques's mother need not be troubled about them?

Not be troubled!—such a message to the Marchioness de Boiscoran and Denise, to Jacques's mother, and Jacques's promised wife!

Certainly, at first, the two wretched women preserved in a measure, their self-control, trying to surpass each other in courage and confidence. But as the hours passed by, their anxiety became intolerable; and gradually, on confiding their apprehensions to each other, their grief broke out beyond all restraint. They thought of Jacques, innocent, and yet treated like one of the worst criminals, alone in his prison cell, given up to the most horrible inspirations of despair. What had been his feelings during the twenty-four hours which had brought him no news from his friends? Must he not fancy himself despised and abandoned?

"It is an intolerable thought!" exclaimed Denise at last "We must get to him at any price."

"How?" asked the marchioness.

"I don't know; but there must be some way. There are things which I would not have ventured upon so long as I was alone; but, with you by my side, I can risk anything. Let us go to the prison."

The old lady promptly donned her mantle, simply saying, "I am ready; let us go."

They had both repeatedly heard that Jacques was kept in "solitary confinement;" but neither of them realised fully the meaning of that expression. They had no idea of this atrocious measure, which, so to say, immures a man alive, leaving him in his cell alone with the crime with which he is charged, and utterly at the mercy of another man, the investigating magistrate, whose duty it is to extort the truth from him. The two ladies were only cognisant of the want of liberty, the cell with its dismal fittings, the barred win-

dow, the bolted door, the jailer shaking his bunch of keys, and the tramp of the sentinel in the passage.

"They cannot," said the old lady, "refuse me permission to see my son."

"They cannot," repeated Denise. "And, besides, I know the jailer, Blangin : his wife was formerly in our service."

When the young girl, therefore, raised the heavy knocker at the prison-door, she was full of cheerful confidence. It was Blangin himself who opened the latter. At the sight of the two women, his features displayed the utmost astonishment.

"We come to see M. de Boiscoran," said Denise boldly.

"Have you a permit, ladies?" asked the keeper.

"From whom?"

"From M. Galpin-Daveline."

"We have no permit."

"Then I am very sorry to have to tell you, that you cannot possibly see M. de Boiscoran. He is kept in solitary confinement, and I have the strictest orders."

Denise's glance was threatening, as she sharply said,—
"Your orders cannot apply to this lady, the Marchioness de Boiscoran."

"My orders apply to everybody, mademoiselle."

"You would not, I am sure, keep a poor, distressed mother from seeing her son?"

"Ah! but—mademoiselle—it does not rest with me. I! Who am I? Nothing more than one of the bolts, drawn or pushed at will."

For the first time, it entered the poor girl's head that her effort might fail : still she tried once more, with tears in her eyes,—
"But I, my dear M. Blangin, think of me! You would not refuse me? Don't you know who I am? Have you never heard your wife speak of me?"

The jailer was certainly touched. "I know," said he, "how much my wife and myself are indebted to your kindness, mademoiselle. But—I have my orders, and you surely would not wish me to lose my place."

"If you lose your place, M. Blangin, I, Denise de Chandore, promise you another place twice as good."

"Mademoiselle!"

"You do not doubt my word, M. Blangin, do you?"

"God forbid! But it is not my place only. If I did what you want me to do, I should be severely punished."

The marchioness judged from the jailer's tone that Denise was not likely to prevail over him, and so she said,—“Don't insist, my child. Let us go back.”

“What? Without finding out what is going on behind these pitiless walls; without knowing even whether Jacques is dead or alive?”

There was evidently a great struggle going on in the jailer's heart. All of a sudden he cast a rapid glance around, and then speaking hurriedly, exclaimed,—“I ought not to tell you—but never mind—I cannot let you go away without telling you that M. de Boiscoran is quite well.”

“Ah!”

“Yesterday, when they brought him here, he was, so to say, overcome. He threw himself upon his bed, and he remained there without stirring for over two hours. I think he must have been crying.”

A sob, which Denise could not suppress, made Blangin start. “Oh, reassure yourself, mademoiselle,” he added quickly. “That state of things did not last long. Soon M. de Boiscoran got up, and said, ‘Why, I am a fool to despair!’”

“Did you hear him say so?” asked the old lady.

“Not I. It was Frumence Cheminot who heard it.”

“Frumence?”

“Yes, one of our jail-birds. Oh! he is only a vagabond, not at all a bad fellow. He has been ordered to stand guard at the door of M. de Boiscoran's cell, and not to lose sight of it for a moment. It was M. Galpin who had the idea, because sometimes, in their first despair, the prisoners . . . a misfortune happens so easily—they become weary of life, you know. . . . Well, Frumence would be there to prevent it.”

The old lady trembled with horror. This precautionary measure, more than anything else, gave her the full measure of her son's situation.

“However,” continued Blangin, “there is nothing to fear. M. de Boiscoran became quite calm again, and even cheerful, if I may so. When he got up this morning, after having slept all night like a dormouse, he sent for me, and asked me for paper, ink, and pen. All the prisoners ask for that the second day. I had orders to let him have them, and so I gave them to him. When I carried him his breakfast, he handed me a letter for Mademoiselle Chandore.”

"What!" cried Denise, "You have a letter for me, and yet don't give it me?"

"I haven't got it now, madame. I had to hand it, as is my duty, to M. Galpin-Davelinè, when he came accompanied by his clerk, Méchainet, to examine M. de Boiscoran."

"And what did he say?"

"He opened the letter, read it, put it into his pocket, and said, 'all right.'"

Tears of anger sprang from Denise's eyes, as she cried,—"What a shame! This man reads a letter written by Jacques to me! It is infamous!" And not thinking of thanking Blangin, she drew the old lady away, and walked home without saying another word.

"Ah, poor child, you did not succeed," exclaimed the two old aunts, when they saw their niece return. But on hearing what had happened, they added;—"Well, we'll go and see this little magistrate, who, but the day before yesterday, was paying us abject court to obtain our cousin's hand. And we'll tell him the truth; and, if we cannot make him give us back Jacques at liberty, we will at least trouble him in his triumph, and crush his pride."

How could poor Denise help adopting the old ladies' notions, when their project offered such immediate satisfaction to her indignation, at the same time serving her secret hopes? "Oh, yes! You are right, dear aunts," she said. "Quick, don't lose any time; go at once!"

Unable to resist her entreaties, they started instantly, without listening to the timid objections made by the marchioness. But the good ladies were sadly mistaken as to M. Galpin's state of mind. Their cousin's ex-lover was not bedded on roses by any means. At the beginning of this extraordinary affair he had gone into it eagerly, looking upon it as an admirable opportunity, long hoped for, and likely to open wide the doors to his burning ambition. Then, having once begun—the investigation being under way—he had been carried along by the current, without having time to reflect. He had even felt a kind of unhealthy satisfaction at seeing the evidence increase, until he was literally compelled to order his former friend to be sent to prison. At that moment he was fairly dazzled by the most magnificent expectations. This preliminary inquiry, which in a few hours already had led to the discovery of a culprit

the most unlikely of all men in the province, could not fail to establish his superior ability and matchless skill.

A few hours later, however, M. Galpin-Daveline looked no longer with the same eye upon these events. Reflection had come; and he had begun to doubt his ability, and to ask himself if he had not, after all, acted rashly. If Jacques were guilty, so much the better. He was sure, in that case, to obtain brilliant promotion immediately after the verdict. Yes, but if Jacques should be innocent? When that thought occurred to M. Galpin for the first time it made him shiver to the marrow of his bones. Jacques innocent!—that was his own condemnation, his career blighted, his hopes destroyed, his prospects ruined for ever. Jacques innocent!—that meant certain disgrace. He would be sent away from Sauveterre, where he could not remain after such a scandal. He would be banished to some out-of-the-way locality, without hope of any possible promotion.

In vain he tried to reason that he had only done his duty. People would answer, if they condescended at all to answer, that there are flagrant blunders, scandalous mistakes, which a magistrate must not commit. People would say that for the honour of justice, and in the interest of the law, it is better, under certain circumstances, to let a guilty man escape, than to punish an innocent one. With such anxiety on his mind,—the most cruel that can tear the heart of an ambitious man,—M. Galpin-Daveline found his pillow stuffed with thorns. He had been up since six o'clock. At eleven, he had sent for his clerk, Mechinet; and they had gone together to the jail to recommence the examination. It was then that the jailer handed him the prisoner's letter to Denise. It was a short note, such as a sensible man would write knowing full well that a prisoner cannot count upon the secrecy of his correspondence. It was not even sealed, a fact which M. Blangin had failed to notice.

"Denise, my darling," wrote M. de Boiscoran, "the thought of the terrible grief I cause you is my most cruel, and almost my only sorrow. Need I stop to assure you that I am innocent? I am sure it is not needed. I am the victim of a fatal combination of circumstances, which could not but mislead justice. But be re-assured, be hopeful. When the time comes, I shall be able to set matters right.

JACQUES."

M. Galpin-Daveline had certainly exclaimed "all right" after reading this letter. Nevertheless it had stung him to the quick. "What assurance!" he muttered to himself.

Still he regained courage while mounting the prison-steps. Jacques had evidently not imagined that his note would reach its destination direct; hence it might be fairly presumed that he had written for the eyes of justice as well as for his lady-love. The fact that the letter was not sealed even gave some weight to this presumption.

"After all, we shall see," said M. Galpin-Daveline, while Blangin was unlocking the door.

But he found Jacques as calm as if he had been in his chateau at Boiscoran, haughty moreover and even scornful. It was impossible to get anything out of him. When he was pressed, he became obstinately silent, or said that he needed time to consider. The magistrate returned home more troubled than ever. The position assumed by Jacques puzzled him. Ah, if he could have retraced his steps! But it was too late. He had burnt his vessels, and condemned himself to go on to the finish. For his own safety, for his future life, it was henceforth necessary that Jacques de Boiscoran should be found guilty; that he should be tried in open court, and there be sentenced. It must be. It was a question of life or death for him.

He was in this state of mind when the Demoiselles de Lavarande called, and asked to see him. "What could the two old ladies want?" he asked.

"Show them in," he said at last, strangely puzzled by this visit.

They entered, and haughtily declined the chairs he offered.

"I hardly expected to have the honour of a visit from you, *mesdames*," began the magistrate, whose remarks were, however, speedily cut short by Mademoiselle Adelaide, the elder of Denise's aunts.

"I suppose not, after what has passed," ejaculated the old lady, who, speaking with all the eloquence of a pious woman trying to wither an impious man, next poured upon him a stream of reproaches for what she called his infamous treachery. "What? How could he appear against Jacques, who was his friend, and who had actually aided him in obtaining the promise of a great match? By that one hope he had become, so to say, a member of the family.

Did he not know that among kinsmen it was a sacred duty to set aside all personal feelings for the purpose of protecting that sacred patrimony called family honour?"

M. Galpin felt like a man upon whom a handful of stones falls from a fifth floor. Still he preserved his self-control, and even asked himself what advantage he might obtain from this extraordinary scene. Might it open a door for reconciliation?

As soon, therefore, as Mademoiselle Adelaide paused, he began justifying himself, painting in hypocritical colours the grief it had given him to carry out his duties, swearing that he was not able to control events, and that Jacques was as dear to him now as ever.

"If he is so dear to you," broke in Mademoiselle Adelaide, "why don't you set him free?"

"Ah! how can I?"

"At least give his family and his friends leave to see him."

"The law will not allow me. If he is innocent, he has only to prove it. If he is guilty, he must confess. In the first case, he will be set free; in the other case he can see whom he wishes."

"If he is so dear to you, how could you dare read the letter he wrote to Denise?"

"It is one of the most painful duties of my profession to do so."

"Ah! And does that profession also prevent you from giving us that letter after reading it?"

"Yes. But I can tell you what it says."

He took the letter in question out of a drawer; and the younger of the two sisters, Mademoiselle Elizabeth, copied it in pencil. When this was finished they both withdrew, almost without saying good-bye.

M. Galpin was furious. "Ah, the old witches!" he exclaimed, "I see clearly you don't believe in Jacques's innocence, or why is his family so very anxious to see him? No doubt they want to enable him to escape the punishment of his crimes by suicide. But, by heavens, that shall not be, if I can help it!"

As we have seen, M. Folgat was excessively annoyed at this step taken by the Demoiselles de Lavarande; still he did not let his annoyance be seen. It was necessary that he should retain perfect presence of mind and calmness in

this cruelly-tried family. M. de Chandore, on the other hand, could not conceal his dissatisfaction so well ; and, in spite of his deference to his grandchild's wishes, he remarked : " I am sure, my dear child, I don't wish to blame you. But you know your aunts and their disposition. They are quite capable of exasperating M. Galpin."

"What does it matter?" asked the young girl haughtily. "Circumspection is all very well for guilty people ; but Jacques is innocent."

"Mademoiselle de Chandore is right," said M. Folgat. "Whatever the ladies may have done, they cannot make matters worse. M. Galpin will be none the less our bitter enemy."

Grandpapa Chandore started.

"Oh ! I do not blame him," continued the young lawyer ; "but I blame the laws which make him act as he does. How can a magistrate remain perfectly impartial in certain very important cases such as this, when his whole future career depends upon success ? A man may be an upright magistrate, incapable of partiality, conscientious in fulfilling all his duties, and yet he is but a man. He has his interest at stake. He does not like the court to find out that there is no case. Great rewards are not always given to the lawyer who has taken most pains to find out the truth."

"But M. Galpin-Davelin was a friend of ours, sir."

"Yes ; and that is what makes me fear. What will be his fate when M. Jacques's innocence is established ?"

"Well, at all events, we shall soon know what the ladies have accomplished."

At that precise moment they entered the drawing-room quite proud of their achievement, and triumphantly waving the copy of Jacques's letter. Denise seized upon it ; and, while she read it in a corner, Mademoiselle Adelaide described the interview, stating how haughty and disdainful she had been, and how humble and repentant M. Galpin had appeared.

"He was completely undone," said the two old ladies with one voice ; "he was crushed, annihilated."

"Yes, you have done a nice thing," growled the old baron ; "and you have much reason to boast, forsooth."

"My aunts have acted rightly," declared Denise. "Just see what Jacques has written ! It is clear and pre-

cise. What can we fear when he says, 'Be re-assured: when the time comes, I shall be able to set matters right?'"

M. Folgat took the letter, read it, and shook his head, "There was no need of this letter," he said, "to confirm my opinion. At the bottom of this affair there is a secret which none of us have yet found out. Still M. de Boiscoran acts very rashly in playing with a criminal prosecution in this manner. Why did he not explain at once? What was easy yesterday may be less easy to-morrow, and perhaps impossible in a week."

"Jacques, sir, is a superior man," cried Denise, "and whatever he says is perfectly sure to be the right thing."

At this moment Madame de Boiscoran entered the room, greatly refreshed by the rest she had taken. She suggested that a telegram should be sent to her husband to acquaint him with what had transpired.

The despatch had been drawn up and sent, and dinner was just over when M. Seneschal arrived, with a full budget of news. The firemen's funeral had passed off quietly, although amid deep emotion. No disturbance had taken place, as was feared; and Dr. Seignebos had not spoken at the graveyard. Both a disturbance and a row would have been badly received, said M. Seneschal; for he was sorry to say, the immense majority of the people of Sauveterre did not doubt M. de Boiscoran's guilt. In several groups he had heard people say, "And still you will see they won't condemn him. If a poor devil committed such a horrible crime he would be guillotined sure enough; but the son of the Marquise de Boiscoran will come out of it as white as snow." The mayor was speaking in this strain when a vehicle was heard stopping at the door.

"Who can that be?" asked Denise, half frightened.

Suddenly a noise of steps and voices, something like a scuffle, was heard in the passage, and directly afterwards Michael, Jacques's tenant's son, pushed open the drawing-room door. "I've got him!" he cried. "Here he is!" And with these words he pushed in Cocoleu, who struggled wildly, and looked around him with frightened eyes like some wild beast caught in a trap.

"Upon my word, my good fellow," said M. Seneschal, "you have done better than the gendarmes!"

Michael winked significantly as if to imply that he had not a very exalted opinion of the cleverness of the gendarmes. "I promised the baron," he said, "to get hold of Cocoleu somehow or other. I knew that at times he went and buried himself, like a wild beast that he is, in a hole scratched out by himself under a rock in the forest of Rochepommier. I had discovered this den of his one day by accident; for a man might pass by a hundred times, and never dream of its existence. But, as soon as the baron told me that the *innocent* had disappeared, I said to myself, 'I'm sure he's in his hole: let us go and see.' So I hastened down to the rocks: and there I found Cocoleu. But it was not so easy to pull him out of his den. He wouldn't come; and while defending himself, he bit me in the hand, like the mad dog that he is." And Michael held up his left hand, wrapped round with a bloody piece of linen.

"It was pretty hard work," he continued, "to get the madman here. I was compelled to tie him hand and foot, and to carry him bodily to my father's house. There we put him into the gig, and now here he is. Just look at the pretty fellow!"

The idiot was truly hideous at that moment, with his livid face covered with red spots, his brutish glances, and his hanging lips fringed with white foam.

"Why would you not come?" asked M. Seneschal.

The idiot looked as if he did not hear.

"Why did you bite Michael?" continued the mayor.

Cocoleu made no reply.

"Do you know that M. de Boiscoran is in prison because of what you said?"

Still no reply.

"Ah!" said Michael, "it is of no use questioning him. You might beat him till to-morrow, and he would rather give up the ghost than say a word."

"I am—I am hungry," stammered Cocoleu.

M. Folgat looked indignant. "And to think," he said, "that upon the testimony of such a being, a capital charge has been made!"

Grandpapa Chandore seemed seriously embarrassed. "But now, what in the world," said he, "are we to do with this idiot?"

"I will take him to the hospital," said M. Seneschal,

"and let Dr. Seignebois and the public prosecutor know *A* his capture."

Dr. Seignebois was an eccentric man, beyond doubt; and the absurdities which his enemies attributed to him were not all unfounded. But he had, at all events, the rare quality of professing for his art a respect nearly akin to enthusiasm. Indeed, according to his views, the faculty possessed that infallibility which he denied the pope. In confidence he certainly admitted that some of his colleagues were amazing donkeys; but he would never have allowed any one else to say so. From the moment a man acquired the famous diploma which gives him the right over life and death, that man became in his eyes an august personage for the world at large. It was a crime, he thought, not to submit blindly to a physician's decision. Hence his obstinacy in opposing M. Galpin-Daveline, hence the bitterness of his contradictions, and the rudeness with which he had requested the "gentlemen of the law" to leave the room in which *his* patient was lying.

"For these devils," he said, "would kill the one in order to get the means of cutting off the other's head."

And thereupon, he had set to work once more, and with the aid of the countess, dug out, grain by grain, the lead which had honeycombed the count's flesh. At nine o'clock the work was finished.

"Not that I fancy I have got all the shot out," he said modestly; "but, if there are any left, they are out of reach and I shall have to wait for certain symptoms to tell me where they are."

As he had foreseen, the count had grown rather worse. His first excitement had given way to perfect prostration; and he seemed insensible to what was going on around him. Fever began to show itself; and, considering the count's constitution, it was easily to be foreseen that delirium would set in before the day was over.

"Nevertheless, I think there is hardly any danger," said the doctor to the countess, after having pointed out all the probable symptoms, so as to keep her from being alarmed. Then he recommended her to let no one approach her husband's bed, and M. Galpin-Daveline least of all.

This recommendation was not useless; for almost at the same moment a peasant entered to say that a man from

Sauveterre wished to see the count. "Show him in," said the doctor: "I'll speak to him."

The visitor was a M. Tetard, a former *huissier*, who had given up his profession and become a dealer in stones. Besides being an ex-officer of justice and a merchant, he was also the agent of a fire insurance company. It was in this capacity that he presumed, as he told the countess, to present himself in person. He had been informed that the farm-buildings at Valpinson, which were insured in his company, had been destroyed by fire; that they had been purposely set on fire by M. de Boiscoran; and that he wished to confer with the Count de Claudieuse on the subject. He had no idea, he added, of contesting the responsibility of his company: he only wished to establish the facts which would enable him to fall back upon M. de Boiscoran, who was a man of fortune, and would certainly be condemned to make compensation for the injury done. For this purpose, certain formalities had to be gone through; and he had called in order to arrange the necessary measures.

"And I," said Dr. Seignebos,—"I request you to take to your heels, and," he added, "I think it very bold of you to dare speak in that way of M. de Boiscoran."

M. Tetard disappeared without saying another word; and the doctor, very much excited by this scene, turned to the youngest daughter of the countess, the one with whom she was sitting up when the fire broke out, and who was now decidedly better. As there was accordingly nothing more to retain him at Valpinson, the doctor carefully pocketed the pieces of lead which he had removed from the count's wounds, and then, drawing the countess to the door, said, "Before I go away, madame, I should like to know what you think of these events."

The unfortunate lady, who looked as pale as death itself, could hardly hold up any longer. There seemed to be nothing alive in her but her eyes, which shone with unusual brilliancy. "Ah! I do not know, sir," she replied in a feeble voice. "How can I collect my thoughts after such terrible shocks?"

"Still you questioned Cocoleu."

"Who would not have done so, when the truth was at stake?"

"And were you not surprised at the name he mentioned?"

"You must have seen that yourself, sir."

"I saw it; and that is exactly why I ask you, and why I want to know what you really think of that poor creature's state of mind."

"Don't you know that he is idiotic?"

"I know it; and that is why I was so surprised to see you insist upon making him talk. Do you really think, that, in spite of his habitual imbecility, he may have glimpses of sense?"

"He had, a few moments before, saved my children from death."

"That proves his devotion for you."

"He is very much attached to me indeed, just like some poor animal I might have picked up and cared for."

"Perhaps so. And still he showed more than mere animal instinct."

"That may be. I have more than once noticed flashes of intelligence in Cocoleu."

The doctor had taken off his spectacles, and was wiping them furiously. "It is a great pity," said he, "that one of these flashes of intelligence did not enlighten him when he saw M. de Boiscoran make a fire and prepare to murder the Count de Claudieuse."

The countess, who was leaning against the door-post, seemed as if about to faint. "But," she replied, "it is precisely to his excitement at the sight of the flames, and at hearing the shots fired, that I ascribe Cocoleu's return to reason."

"May be," said the doctor, "may be." Then putting on his spectacles again, he added, "That is a question to be decided by the professional men who will have to examine the poor imbecile."

"What! Is he going to be examined?"

"Yes, and very thoroughly, madame, I assure you. And now I have the honour of wishing you good-bye. However, I shall come back to-night, unless you should succeed during the day in finding lodgings at Sauveterre,—an arrangement which would be very desirable for myself, in the first place, and not less so for your husband and your daughter. They are not comfortable in this cottage."

Thereupon he lifted his hat, returned to the town, and

immediately asked M. Seneschal to have Cocoleu arrested. Unfortunately the gendarmes had been unsuccessful; and Dr. Seignebos, who saw how unfortunate all this was for Jacques, was growing terribly impatient, when, on Saturday night, towards ten o'clock, M. Seneschal darted into his room, exclaiming, "Cocoleu is found."

The doctor would have hurried off at once to see the idiot, if M. Seneschal had not pointed out the lateness of the hour, and the inconvenience of waking up the sisters at the hospital, where Cocoleu had been conveyed. Accordingly M. Seignebos resolved to postpone his visit till the morrow.

VI.

It was a little before eight o'clock on Sunday morning, when Dr. Seignebos entered the courtyard of the Sauverterre hospital. He was walking faster than usual, with his hat over his eyes, and his hands thrust deep into his pockets. He went straight to the room of the lady superior, and, after the usual salutations, observed, "They brought you, my sister, last night, a patient, an idiot, called Cocoleu."

"Yes, doctor."

"Where has he been put?"

"The mayor had him installed in the room opposite the linen room."

"And how has he behaved?"

"Perfectly well: the sister who kept watch did not hear him stir."

"Thanks, my sister!" said Dr. Seignebos.

He was already at the door, when the lady superior recalled him. "Are you going up to see the poor fellow, doctor?" she asked.

"Yes, my sister: why?"

"Because you cannot see him."

"I cannot?"

"No. The public prosecutor has sent orders not to let any one, except the sister who nurses him, come near Cocoleu,—no one, doctor, not even the physician, in case of urgency, of course, excepted."

Dr. Seignebos smiled ironically. Then he said, laughing scornfully,—“Ah, these are your orders, are they?”

Well, I tell you that I do not mind them in the least. Who can prevent me from seeing my patient? Tell me that! Let the public prosecutor give his orders in his court-house as much as he chooses! But in my hospital! My sister, I am going to Cocoleu's room."

"Doctor, you cannot go there. There is a gendarme at the door."

"A gendarme?"

"Yes, he came this morning with the strictest orders."

For a moment the doctor seemed thunderstruck. Then he suddenly broke out with unusual violence, and in a voice that made the windows shake he cried, "This is unheard of! This is an abominable abuse of power! And by the hundred thousand thunders of heaven, I'll have my rights, and justice shall be done me, if I have to go to Thiers!"

So saying he rushed out without ceremony, crossed the yard, and disappeared like an arrow, in the direction of the court-house. A moment later he fell into M. Daubigeon's room like a bombshell.

"I know what brings you, doctor," said the public prosecutor. "You come about that order I have given concerning Cocoleu."

"Yes, indeed, sir! That order is an insult."

"I have been asked to give it as a matter of necessity, by M. Galpin-Daveline."

"And why did you not refuse? You alone are responsible for it in my eyes. You are the public prosecutor, and M. Galpin is but your subordinate."

M. Daubigeon shook his head, replying, "There you are mistaken, doctor. In such a case the investigating magistrate is independent of myself and of the court. He is not even bound to obey the advocate-general, who may make suggestions to him, but who cannot give him orders. M. Galpin Daveline, in his capacity as examining magistrate, has his independent jurisdiction, and is armed with almost unlimited power. No one in the world can repeat so well as an examining magistrate the poet's famous phrase:—

'Hoc volo, sic jubeo, sit pro ratione voluntas.'"

For once Dr. Seignebos seemed convinced by M. Daubi

geon's words. "Then," said he, "M. Galpin-Daveline has even the right to deprive a sick man of his physician's assistance."

"If he assumes the responsibility, yes. But he does not mean to go so far. He was, on the contrary, about to ask you, although it is Sunday, to be present at a second examination which Cocoleu is to undergo. I am surprised you have not received his note, and that you did not meet him at the hospital."

"Well, I will go there again at once," said the doctor, hurrying down stairs.

This time, as he reached the door of the hospital, he came face to face with M. Galpin-Daveline, who was just arriving, accompanied by his faithful clerk, Mechinet. "You come in the nick of time, doctor," began the magistrate, with his usual solemnity.

But, short and rapid as the doctor's walk had been, it had given him time to reflect and to grow cool. Instead of breaking out into recriminations, he replied in a tone of mock politeness,—“Yes, I know. We have to see the poor devil to whom you've given a gendarme for nurse. Let us go up : I am at your service.”

Cocoleu occupied a large white-washed room, furnished with a bed, a table, and two chairs. The bed was no doubt a good one ; but the idiot had taken off the bedding and blankets, and lain down in his clothes on the straw mattress. It was thus that the magistrate and the physician found him as they entered. He rose at their appearance ; but, on seeing the gendarme, he uttered a cry, and tried to hide under the bed. M. Galpin-Daveline promptly ordered the gendarme to pull him out again.

This being done, the magistrate stepped forward and said :—“Don't be afraid, Cocoleu. We mean you no harm ; only you must answer our questions. Do you recollect what happened the other night at Valpinson ? ”

Cocoleu laughed,—an idiot's laugh—but he made no reply. During a complete hour, begging, threatening, and promising by turns, the magistrate tried in vain to get him to speak, but not even the name of the Countess de Claudieuse had any effect on him. At last, utterly out of patience, M. Galpin-Daveline exclaimed,—“Let us go. The wretch is worse than a brute.”

"Was he any better," asked the doctor, "when he denounced M. de Boiscoran?"

The magistrate pretended not to hear; but as they were about to leave the room, he said to the doctor,—“You know that I expect your report?”

“In forty-eight hours I shall have the honour to hand it to you,” replied the practitioner, who mentally added:—“And that report is going to give you some trouble, my good man.”

In point of fact the report was already drawn up: but the doctor was of opinion that the longer he could delay its delivery, the more chance he would probably have of defeating the plan of the prosecution.

“As I mean to keep it two days longer,” he thought on his way home, “why should I not show it to this Paris lawyer who has come down with the marchioness? Nothing need prevent me, as far as I see, since Galpin, in his utter confusion, has forgotten to put me under oath.”

But he paused. According to the laws of medical jurisprudence, had he the right, or not, to communicate such a document to the prisoner’s counsel? This question troubled him; for, although he boasted that he did not believe in God, he believed firmly in professional duty, and would have allowed himself to be cut to pieces rather than break its laws.

However, the result of his meditation was, that as soon as he had breakfasted, he put his report in his pocket, and went by the side streets to M. de Chandore’s house. The marchioness and the two aunts were still at church, where they had thought it best to show themselves; and there was no one in the drawing-room but Denise, the baron, and M. Folgat. The old gentleman was very much surprised to see the doctor. The latter was his family physician, it is true; but, except in cases of sickness, the two never saw each other, their political opinions being so very different.

“If you see me here,” said the physician, “it is simply because, upon my honour and my conscience, I believe that M. de Boiscoran is innocent.”

Denise would have liked to embrace the doctor for these words. With the greatest eagerness she pushed a large easy-chair towards him, and in her sweetest voice, exclaimed,—“Pray sit down, my dear doctor.”

"Thanks," he answered curtly. Then turning to M. Folgat, he added,—*"I am convinced that M. de Boiscoran is the victim of the Republican opinions which he has so boldly professed ; for, baron, your future son-in-law is a Republican."*

Grandpapa Chandore made no reply. If they had come and told him that Jacques had been a member of the Commune, he would not have been any more moved. Denise loved Jacques. That was enough for him.

"Well," continued the doctor, *"I am a Radical, I, M.—"*

"Folgat," said the young lawyer.

"Yes M. Folgat, I am a Radical ; and it is my duty to defend a man whose political opinions so closely resemble mine. I come, therefore, to show you my medical report, to see if you can make any use of it in your defence of M. de Boiscoran, or suggest to me any ideas."

"Ah!" exclaimed the young man. *"That is a very valuable service."*

"But let us understand each other," said the physician earnestly. *"If I speak of listening to your suggestions, I take it for granted that they are based upon facts. If I had a son, and he were to die on the scaffold, I would not use the slightest falsehood to save him."*

He had, meanwhile, drawn the report from his coat pocket, and now placed it on the table with these words,—*"I shall call for it again to-morrow morning. In the mean time, you can think it over. I should like, however, to point out to you the main point, the culminating point, if I may say so."*

The doctor spoke with much hesitation, and looked fixedly at Denise, as if to make her understand that he would like her to leave the room. Seeing that she did not take the hint, he added,—*"A medical and legal discussion would hardly interest the young lady."*

"Why, sir, why, should I not be deeply, passionately interested in anything that regards the man who is to be my husband?"

"Because ladies are generally very sensitive," said the doctor uncivilly.

"Don't think so, doctor. For Jacques's sake, I promise you I will show quite masculine energy."

The doctor knew Denise well enough to see she did not mean to go; accordingly he growled,—“As you will.”

Then, turning again to M. Folgat, he said,—“You know there were two shots fired at the Count de Claudieuse. One, which hit him in the side, nearly missed him; the other, which struck his shoulder and his neck, was well aimed.”

“I know it,” said the advocate.

“The difference in the effect shows that the two shots were fired from different distances, the second much nearer than the first.”

“I know, I know!”

“Excuse me. If I refer to these details, it is because they are important. When I was sent for in the middle of the night to come and see the Count de Claudieuse, I at once set to work extracting the particles of lead that had lodged in the flesh. While I was thus engaged, M. Galpin-Daveline arrived. I expected he would ask me to show him the shot: but no, he did not think of it; he was too full of his own ideas. He thought only of the culprit—of *his* culprit. I did not recall to him the A B C of his profession; that was none of my business. The physician has to obey the directions of justice, but not to anticipate them.”

“Well, then?”

“Then M. Galpin went off to Boiscoran, and I completed my work. I extracted fifty-seven shot from the count’s wound in the side, and a hundred and nine from the wound on the shoulder and the neck; and, when I had done that, do you know what I found out?”

He paused, waiting to see the effect of his words; and everybody’s attention seeming fully roused, he added,—“I found out that the shot in the two wounds was not alike.”

M. de Chandore and M. Folgat gave vent simultaneously to exclamations of surprise.

“The shot that was first fired,” resumed Dr. Seignebois, “and which has touched the side, is the very smallest-sized ‘dust.’ That in the shoulder, on the other hand, is quite large-sized; such as I think is used in shooting hares. However, I have some samples.”

And with these words he opened a piece of white paper, in which were ten or twelve pieces of lead, stained with

coagulated blood, and showing at once a considerable difference in size. M. Folgat looked puzzled. "Could there have been two murderers?" he asked half aloud.

"I rather think," said M. de Chandore, "that the murderer had, like many sportsmen, one barrel ready for birds, and another for hares or rabbits."

"At all events, this fact puts all premeditation out of question. A man does not load his gun with small-shot in order to commit murder."

Dr. Seignebos thought he had said enough, and rose to take his leave.

"Well?" asked Denise and M. de Chandore, as soon as they had heard the street-door close behind him.

"Before giving an opinion," replied M. Folgat cautiously, "I must study this estimable doctor's report."

Unfortunately, the report contained nothing that the doctor had not mentioned. In vain did the young advocate try all the afternoon to find something in it that might be useful for the defence. There were arguments in it, to be sure, which might be very valuable when the trial came on, but nothing that could be used to induce the prosecution to give up the case. The whole household, therefore, were cruelly disappointed and dejected, when, about five o'clock, old Anthony arrived from Boiscoran, looking very sad.

"I have been relieved of my duties," he said. "At two o'clock, M. Galpin-Daveline came to take off the seals. He was accompanied by his clerk, Mechinot, and brought M. Jacques with him, and guarded by two gendarmes in civilian's clothes. When the room was opened, that unlucky man Galpin asked M. Jacques if those were the clothes which he wore the night of the fire, his boots, his gun, and the water in which he had washed his hands. When he had acknowledged everything, the water was carefully poured into a bottle, which they sealed, and handed to one of the gendarmes. Then they put master's clothes in a large trunk, together with his gun, several parcels of cartridges and some other articles, which the magistrate said were needed for the trial. The trunk was sealed like the bottle, and put on to the box of the carriage; and then Galpin went off, and told me I was free."

"And Jacques," asked Denise eagerly—"how did he look?"

"Master, madame, laughed contemptuously."

"Did you speak to him?" asked M. Folgat.

"Oh, no, sir! M. Galpin would not allow me."

"And did you have time to look at the gun?"

"I could but just glance at the cock."

"And what did you see?"

The brow of the old servant grew still darker, as he replied sadly,—*"I saw that I had done well to keep silent. The lock is black. Master must have used his gun since I cleaned it."*

Grandpapa Chandore and M. Folgat exchanged looks of distress. One more hope was lost.

"Now," said the young lawyer, "tell me how M. de Boiscoran usually charged his gun."

"He used cartridges, sir, of course. They sent him, I think, two thousand with the gun,—some ball cartridges, some charged with large shot, and others with shot of every size. At this season, when shooting is prohibited, master could shoot nothing but rabbits, or birds of passage in the marshes; so he always loaded one barrel with tolerably large shot, and the other with small-shot."

At this point Anthony stopped suddenly short, shocked at the impression which his statement seemed to produce.

"That is terrible!" cried Denise, "everything is against us!"

M. Folgat did not give her time to say anything more. "My dear Anthony," he asked, "did M. Galpin take all your master's cartridges away with him?"

"Oh, no, certainly not."

"Well, you must instantly go back to Boiscoran, and bring me three or four cartridges of each number."

"All right," said the old man. "I'll be back in a short time." He started immediately; and such was his diligence that he reappeared at seven o'clock, just as the family was finishing dinner.

M. de Chandore and M. Folgat had soon opened several of the cartridges contained in a large package which had been placed on the table; and, after a few failures, they found two numbers of shot which corresponded exactly with the samples left by the doctor.

"There is an incomprehensible fatality in all this," said the old gentleman in an undertone.

The young lawyer, also, looked discouraged. "It is madness," he said, "to try and establish M. de Boiscoran's innocence without having first communicated with him."

"And if you could do so to-morrow?" asked Denise.

"Then, mademoiselle, he might give us the key to this mystery which we are in vain trying to solve; or, at least, he might tell us the way to find it all out. But that is not to be thought of. M. de Boiscoran is kept in solitary confinement; and you may rest assured M. Galpin will prevent all communication with his prisoner."

"Who knows?" said the young girl. And immediately drawing M. de Chandore aside into one of the little card-rooms adjoining the salon, she asked him,—*"Grandpapa, am I rich?"*

Never in her life before had such a question entered her head, and she was to a certain extent utterly ignorant of the value of money.

"Yes, you are rich, my child," replied the old gentleman.

"How much have I?"

"You have in your own right, coming to you from your father and mother, twenty-six thousand francs a year, or a capital of about eight hundred thousand francs."

"And is that a good deal?"

"It is so much, that you are one of the richest heiresses of the district; but you have, besides, considerable expectations."

Denise was so preoccupied, that she did not appear to notice. She went on asking,—*"What do they mean here, when they speak of being well off?"*

"That depends, my child. If you will tell me—"

She interrupted him, stamping her foot impatiently: *"Nothing. Please answer me!"*

"Well, in our little town, an income of from four to eight thousand francs makes anybody very well off."

"Let us say six thousand."

"Well, six thousand would make a man very comfortable."

"And what capital would produce such an income?"

"At five per cent, it would take a hundred and twenty thousand francs."

"That is to say, rather more than one-eighth of my fortune."

"Exactly."

"Never mind. I presume it is a large sum, and it would be rather difficult for you, grandpa, to get it together by to-morrow morning?"

"Naturally it would, still I have by me as much as this in railway bonds, which are just as good as current money."

"Ah, do you mean to say, that, if I gave anybody a hundred and twenty thousand francs in those bonds it would be just the same to him as if I gave him that sum in bank notes?"

"Just so."

Denise smiled. She thought she saw light. "If that is so," she continued. "I must ask you, grandpa, to give me a hundred and twenty thousand francs in railway bonds."

The old gentleman started. "You are joking," he said. "What do you want with so much money? You are surely joking."

"Not at all. I was never more serious in my life," replied Denise in a tone of voice which could not be mistaken. "I beseech you, grandpa, if you love me, give me these hundred and twenty thousand francs this evening. You hesitate? O my God! You may kill me if you refuse."

M. de Chandore hesitated no longer. "Since you so anxiously desire it," he said, "I am going up stairs to fetch them."

Denise clapped her hands with joy. "That's right," cried she. "Make haste and dress; for I have to go out, and you must go with me. Then returning to her aunts and the marchioness, she said, "I hope you will excuse me, if I leave you; but I must go out."

"At this hour?" cried Aunt Elizabeth. "Where are you going?"

"To my dressmakers, the Demoiselles Mechinet. I want a dress."

"Good heavens!" cried Aunt Adelaide, "the child is losing her mind!"

"I assure you I am not, aunt."

"Then let me go with you."

"Thank you, no. I shall go alone; that is to say, merely with dear grandpapa."

At that moment M. de Chandore returned, his pockets

full of bonds, his hat on his head, and his cane in his hand. Denise instantly carried him off, exclaiming,—“Come quick, dear grandpapa, we must make haste.”

VII.

ALTHOUGH M. de Chandore literally worshipped his grandchild on bended knees, although he had transferred to her,—the sole survivor of his once large family,—all his hopes, all his affections, still it was not without some scruples that he had gone upstairs to take so large an amount of securities from his strong box. Accordingly, as soon as they were outside the house, he exclaimed,—“Now we are alone, my dear child, will you tell me what you mean to do with all this money?”

“That is my secret,” replied Denise.

“And you have not confidence enough in your old grandfather to tell him what it is, darling?”

He stopped a moment; but she urged him onward, saying,—“You shall know everything, and in less than an hour. But, oh! you mustn’t be angry, grandpa. I have a plan, is no doubt very foolish. If I told you, I am afraid you would stop me; and if you succeeded, and then something happened to Jacques, I should not survive the misery. And consider what you yourself would feel, if you were to think afterwards, ‘If I had only let her have her way!’”

“Denise, you are cruel!”

“On the other hand, if you didn’t induce me to abandon my project, you would certainly take away all my courage; and I need it all, I tell you, grandpa, for what I am going to risk.”

“You see, my dear child, and you must pardon me for repeating it once more, a hundred and twenty thousand francs is a large sum of money; and there are many excellent and clever people who work hard, and deny themselves everything a whole life long, without putting by as much.”

“Ah, so much the better!” cried Denise. “So much the better. I do hope there will be enough, so as to meet with no refusal!”

Grandpapa Chandore began to comprehend. “After

all," he said, "you have not told me where we are going."

"To my dressmakers."

"To the Demoiselles Mechinet?"

"Yes."

M. de Chandore was sure now. "We shall not find them at home," he said. "To-day is Sunday, and they are no doubt at church."

"We shall find them, grandpa; for they always take tea at half-past seven with their brother, the examining magistrate's clerk. But we must make haste."

The old gentleman did make haste, but it is a long way from the Rue de la Rampe to the Place du Marche Neuf, where the sisters Mechinet lived, in a house of their own if you please,—a house which was intended to be the delight of their days, but which had become the terror of their nights. They had bought this house the year before the Franco-German war, acting upon their brother's advice, and going halves with him in the purchase, which represented a sum of forty-seven thousand francs. It seemed such a capital bargain, the basement and first floor being rented at a high figure by the leading grocer of the town, that the sisters did not hesitate about paying the sum of ten thousand francs in hard cash, and binding themselves to pay the remainder in three annual instalments. Everything went well enough during the first year, but then came the war and its disastrous consequences. Both the brother's and the sisters' income was much reduced, and it was only by dint of excessive economy and with the assistance of a timely loan that they managed to pay the second instalment. However, peace had now returned, and as the brother was one of the hardest working men in the town, and as his sisters were patronised by all the aristocracy of the district, it seemed probable that, after a little delay, they would manage to get over their difficulties.

"Grandpapa, they are at home," said Denise, as she and M. de Chandore reached the Place du Marche Neuf.

"Do you think so?"

"I am sure, for I see lights in their windows."

M. de Chandore stopped. "What am I to do next?" he asked.

"You must give me the bonds, grandpa, and wait for

me here, walking up and down, whilst I go up to the Demoiselles Mechinet. I would ask you to come up too, but they would be frightened at seeing you. Moreover, if my enterprise does not succeed, coming merely from a girl it could not have any after consequences."

The old gentleman's last doubts had now vanished. "You won't succeed, my poor child," he said.

"Good heavens!" she replied, checking her tears with difficulty, "why do you discourage me?"

M. de Chandore made no rejoinder. Suppressing a sigh, he pulled the papers out of his pockets, and helped Denise to cram them, as well as she could, into a little bag she carried in her hand. As soon as this was over, she bid her grandfather good-bye, adding that she should soon have done; and then with a lightsome step she crossed the street, and entered the abode of the Demoiselles Mechinet. The old ladies and their brother were just finishing their supper, consisting of a small piece of pork and a light salad, with an abundance of vinegar. At the unexpected entrance of Mademoiselle de Chandore, with a smile on her lips, they all started up.

"You, mademoiselle," cried the elder of the two,—
"you!"

Denise understood perfectly well the meaning of that simple "you." Combined with the tone of voice in which it was uttered, it plainly signified, "What? your betrothed is charged with an abominable crime; there is overwhelming evidence against him; he is in jail, in close confinement; everybody says he will be tried at the assizes, and he will be condemned—and you are here?"

Still Denise did not cease smiling. "Yes," she replied, "it is I. I must have two dresses for next week; and I came to ask you to show me some patterns."

The Demoiselles Mechinet, always acting upon their brother's advice, had made an arrangement with a large house at Bordeaux, to receive samples of goods, being allowed a discount on whatever they sold.

"I will do so with pleasure," said the elder sister. "Just allow me to light a lamp. It is almost dark." While she was wiping the glass, and trimming the wick, she asked her brother,—
"Are you not going to the Orpheon meeting?"

"Not to-night," he replied.

"Are you not expected there?"

"No: I sent word I could not come. I have two plates to lithograph for the printer, and some urgent copying to do for the court."

While speaking, Mechinet had folded up his napkin, and lighted a candle. "Good night!" he said to his sisters. "I shan't see you again this evening," and then bowing deeply to Mademoiselle de Chandore, he left the room, candle in hand.

"Where is your brother going?" asked Denise eagerly.

"To his room, mademoiselle, just opposite, on the other side of the stair-case."

Denis coloured as red as fire. Was she to let her opportunity slip,—an opportunity such as she had never dared to hope for? Summoning up all her courage, she exclaimed:—"But, now, I think of it, I want to say a few words to your brother, my dear demoiselles. Wait for me a moment, I shall be back very soon. So saying, Denise rushed from the room, leaving the stupefied dressmakers gazing after her with open mouths, and asking themselves if Mademoiselle de Chandore was not bereft of her reason.

The clerk was still on the landing, fumbling in his pocket for the key of his room. "I want to speak to you instantly," said Denise to him.

Mechinet was so utterly amazed, that he could not utter a word. He made a movement as if desirous of returning to his sisters, but Denise stopped him, saying, "No, in your room. We must not be overheard. Open the door, sir, please. Open, somebody might come."

The fact was, he was so completely upset that it took him half a minute to insert the key in the keyhole: At last, when the door was opened, he moved aside to let Denise pass first, but she declined to do so, exclaiming:—"No, go in."

He obeyed. She followed him, and, as soon as she was in the room, she shut the door again, even fastening a little bolt, which she had noticed. Mechinet, the clerk, was famous in Sauveterre for his coolness. Denise, on the other hand, was timidity personified, and blushed for the smallest trifle. At this moment, however, it was certainly

not she who was embarrassed. "Sit down, M. Mechainet," she said, "and listen to me."

He put his candlestick on the table, and sat down.

"You know me, don't you?" asked Denise.

"Certainly I do, mademoiselle."

"You have surely heard that I am to be married to M. de Boiscoran?"

The clerk started up as if he had been moved by a spring, pressed his hand to his forehead, and cried:—"Ah, what a fool I was! Now I see!"

"Yes, you are right," replied the girl. "I come to talk to you about M. de Boiscoran, my betrothed, my husband."

She paused; and for minute Mechainet and Denise remained there face to face silent and motionless, looking at each other, he asking himself what she could want of him, and she trying to guess how far she might venture.

"You can no doubt imagine, M. Mechainet, what I have suffered, since M. de Boiscoran has been sent to prison charged with the worst of crimes!"

"Oh, surely I do!" replied Mechainet. And carried away by his emotion, he added, "But I can assure you, mademoiselle, that I, who have been present at all the examinations, and who have no small experience in criminal matters,—that I believe M. de Boiscoran innocent. I know M. Galpin-Daveline does not think so, nor M. Daubigeon, nor any of the gentlemen of the bar, or the town; but, nevertheless, that is my conviction. You see, I was there when they fell upon M. de Boiscoran, asleep in his bed. Well, the very tone of his voice, as he cried out, 'Oh, my dear Galpin!' told me the man was not guilty."

"Oh, sir," stammered Denise, "thanks, thanks!"

"There is nothing to thank me for, mademoiselle; for time has only confirmed my conviction. As if a guilty man ever bore himself as M. de Boiscoran does! You ought to have seen him just now, when we went to remove the seals, calm, dignified, answering coldly all the questions that were asked. I could not help telling M. Galpin-Daveline what I thought. He said I was a fool. Well, I maintain the contrary. The more I see of M. de Boiscoran, the more he gives me the impression that he has only a word to say to clear up the whole matter."

Denise listened with such absorbing interest, that she

well-nigh forgot the object of her visit. "Then M. de Boiscoran is not much overcome?" she eventually asked.

"I should lie if I said he did not look sad, mademoiselle," was the reply. "But he is not overcome. After the first astonishment, his presence of mind returned; and since then M. Galpin has vainly tried all his ingenuity and cleverness—"

Here Mechinnet suddenly paused, as a drunken man recovering his consciousness for a moment on becoming aware that he had said too much in his cups might have done. "Great God!" he exclaimed, "what am I talking about? For heaven's sake, madame, do not let anybody know what my respectful sympathy led me to tell you just now."

Denise felt that the decisive moment had now arrived. "If you knew me better, sir," said she, "you would know that you can rely upon my discretion. You need not regret having given me some little comfort in my great sorrow. You need not; for—" Her voice nearly failed her, and it was only with a great effort she could add,—"For I come to ask you to do even more than that for me, oh, yes, much more."

Mechinnet had turned painfully pale. "Not another word, mademoiselle," he exclaimed vehemently, "your hope is in itself an insult. You ought surely to know that by my profession, as well as by my oath, I am bound to be as silent as the very cells in which the prisoners are confined. If I, the clerk, were to betray the secret of a criminal prosecution—"

Denise trembled like an aspen-leaf; but her mind remained clear and decided. "You would rather let an innocent man perish," she said.

"Mademoiselle!"

"You would let an innocent man be condemned although you might know he was the victim of a mistake? You would say to yourself, 'It is unlucky; but I have sworn not to speak'? And with a quiet conscience you would see him mount the scaffold? No, I cannot believe it! No, that cannot be true!"

"I told you, mademoiselle, I do not believe M. de Boiscoran to be guilty."

"And you refuse to assist me in establishing his innocence? O God! what ideas men form of their duty! How can I move you? how can I convince you? Must I

remind you of the torture endured by this man whom they charge with being an assassin? Must I tell you what horrible anguish we suffer, we, his friends, his relatives,—how his mother weeps, how I weep, I, his promised wife! We know he is innocent: and yet we cannot establish his innocence for want of a friend!”

The clerk had never heard such burning words in all his life. He was moved to the bottom of his heart. At last in trembling tones he asked Denise what she wanted him to do.

“Oh! very little, sir, very little,—just to send M. de Boiscoran ten lines, and to bring us his reply.”

The boldness of the request seemed to stun the clerk. “Never!” he replied.

“You will not have pity?”

“I should forfeit my honour.”

“And, if you let an innocent man be condemned, what would that be?”

Mechinet’s anguish of mind was evident. Amazed, overcome, he did not know what to say, what to do. At last, however, he thought of a reason for refusing: “And if I were found out?” he stammered. “I should lose my place, ruin my sisters, destroy my career for life.”

With trembling hands, Denise drew from her pocket the bonds her grandfather had given her, and threw them in a heap on the table. “There are a hundred and twenty thousand francs,” she began.

The clerk drew back frightened. “Money!” he cried. “You offer me money!”

“Oh don’t be offended!” began the girl again, in a voice that would have moved a stone. “How could I want to offend you, when I ask of you more than my life? There are services which can never be paid. But, if the enemies of M. de Boiscoran should find out that you have aided us, their rage might turn against you.”

Instinctively the clerk unloosened his cravat. The struggle going on within him was, no doubt, terrible. “A hundred and twenty thousand francs!” he said in a low voice.

Is it not enough?” asked the young girl. “Yes, you are right: it is very little. But I have as much again for you, twice as much!”

With troubled eyes, Mechinnet approached the table.

and convulsively handling the pile of papers, he repeated, "A hundred and twenty thousand francs! six thousand francs a year!"

"No, double that amount!" answered Denise, "and, moreover, our gratitude, our devoted friendship, all the influence of the two families of Boiscoran and Chandore; in a word, fortune, position, respect."

But by this time, thanks to a supreme effort of will, the clerk had recovered his self-control. "No more, mademoiselle, say no more!" he exclaimed. And with a determined, though still trembling voice, he continued, "Take your money back again, mademoiselle. If I were to do what you want me to do, if I were to betray my duty for money, I should be the basest of men. If, on the other hand, I am actuated only by a sincere conviction and an interest in the truth, I may be looked upon as a fool; but I shall always be worthy of honest men's esteem. Take back that fortune which has made my conscience waver for a moment. I will do what you ask, but for nothing."

If Grandpapa Chandore was getting tired of walking up and down the Place du Marche Neuf, Mechinet's sisters found time pass still more slowly in their work-room. Denise's visit and her mysterious manner had aroused all their feminine curiosity, and at length, unable to wait any longer, they ventured out on to the landing and knocked at the clerk's door.

"Ah, leave me alone!" cried Mechinet, angry at being thus interrupted. But after a moment's reflection he partially opened the door, and added in a gentle tone: "Go back to your room, my dear sisters, and, if you wish to spare me a very serious embarrassment, never tell anybody that Mademoiselle de Chandore has been here talking with me."

Trained to obey, the two sisters quickly retreated, not, however, without casting an astonished look at the pile of bonds which Denise had thrown upon the table. Mademoiselle de Chandore had meanwhile sunk on to a chair, and was crying bitterly. The clerk shut the door again and looked at her for a moment, then, having overcome his own emotion, he proceeded to discuss Denise's application with relative calm. He expatiated on the precautions which M. Galvin-Daveline had taken with the view of preventing any communication with his prisoner; and

despite Mademoiselle de Chandore's renewed appeals it was evident that Mechinet was in great perplexity.

"I really don't see," he said, "how I am to let M. de Boiscoran have your note? If he knew of its coming beforehand, the matter would be tolerably easy. But he is unprepared. And then he is just as suspicious as M. Galpin. He is always afraid lest a trap is being prepared for him. If I make him a sign, I fear he will not understand me; and, if I make him a sign, may not M. Galpin see it? That man is lynx-eyed."

"Are you never alone with M. de Boiscoran?" asked Denise.

"Never for an instant, mademoiselle. I only go in and come out with the magistrate. You will say, perhaps, that in leaving, as I am behind, I might cleverly drop the note. But, when we leave, the jailer is there, and he has good eyes. Besides, I should have to fear M. de Boiscoran's own suspicions. If he saw a letter coming to him in that way, from me, he is quite capable of handing it at once to M. Galpin."

After a moment's meditation, Mechinet continued,—
"The safest way would probably be to win the confidence of M. Blangin, the jail-keeper, or that of the prisoner who waits on M. de Boiscoran, and watches him."

"Frumence!" exclaimed Denise.

"What!" asked the clerk with evident surprise. "You know his name?"

"Yes, for Blangin mentioned him to me the day when I went with M. de Boiscoran's mother to the jail, not knowing what was meant by 'solitary confinement.'"

"That step was a great mistake," said Mechinet. "I now understand a great deal of M. Galpin-Daveline's anxiety; he fancies you want to rob him of his prisoner. Still never mind! I'll see what can be done. Write your letter, mademoiselle, here are pens and ink."

Without a word, Denise sat down at Mechinet's table; but at the moment she was putting her pen to paper, she asked,—
"Has M. de Boiscoran any books in his prison?"

"Yes, mademoiselle. At his request M. Galpin-Daveline obtained for him some books of travels, together with some of Cooper's novels."

Denise uttered a cry of delight. "O Jacques!" she said; "how glad am you counted upon me!" and, with

out noticing Mechinet's intense surprise at this remark, she instantly wrote as follows :—

"We are sure of your innocence, Jacques, and yet we are in despair. Your mother is here, a Paris lawyer, M. Folgat, who is devoted to your interests. What must we do? Give us your instructions. You can reply without fear, as you have *our* book. DENISE."

"Read this," she said to the clerk, when she had finished. But he did not avail himself of the permission. He folded the paper, and slipped it into an envelope, which he sealed.

"Oh, you are very kind!" said the girl, touched by his delicacy.

"Not at all, mademoiselle. I only try to do a dishonest thing in the most honest way possible. To-morrow, mademoiselle, you shall have your answer."

"I will call for it."

Mechinet trembled. "Do not think of doing so," he said. "The good people of Sauveterre are too cunning not to know that just now you have something more important than dress to occupy your mind. Your visits here would look suspicious. Leave me to forward you M. de Boiscoran's answer."

While Denise was writing, the clerk had made a parcel of the bonds. "Take them back, mademoiselle," he said. "If I want money for Blangin, or Frumence, I will ask you for it. And now you must go: you need not see my sisters. I will explain your visit to them."

VIII.

"WHAT can have happened to Denise, that she does not come back?" murmured Grandpapa Chandore, as he walked up and down the Place, and looked for the twentieth time at his watch. For some time the fear of displeasing his grandchild, kept him where she had told him to wait for her; but at last, her delay proved too much for him, and, crossing the road, he entered Mechinet's house. He was just putting his foot on the first step of the stairs, when he saw a light above. At the same moment he dis-

tinguished his granddaughter's voice, and then her light step.

"At last!" he thought. And swiftly, like a schoolboy who hears his teacher coming, and fears to be caught in some act of disobedience, he slipped back into the Place. Denise was there almost at the same moment, and as she rained a shower of kisses upon the old gentleman's furrowed cheek, exclaimed, "Dear Grandpapa, I bring you back your bonds!"

M. de Chandore, although amazed at any one having the audacity to resist his grandchild's entreaties, at once jumped to the conclusion that she had failed in her attempt. However, he was speedily undeceived, and as they walked swiftly home, Denise gave him all the details of the interview. "That clerk is a good man," he said, "he has won our eternal gratitude." Then, after a pause, he declared, in all earnest, that he did not know which to admire most,—Denise's presence of mind, or Mechinot's disinterestedness.

"All the more reason," said Denise, "why we should not add to the danger in which he will find himself placed. I promised him to tell nobody, and I mean to keep my promise. If you believe me, dear grandpa, we had better not speak of it to anybody, not even to my aunts."

"You might just as well declare at once, little scamp, that you want to save Jacques quite alone, without anybody's help."

"Ah, if I could but do that! Unfortunately, we must take M. Folgat into our confidence; for we cannot do without his advice."

And so it was arranged. The poor aunts, and even the marchioness, had to remain content with Denise's not very plausible explanation of her visit. A few hours afterwards, M. de Chandore, his granddaughter, and M. Folgat held a private council in the baron's study. The young lawyer was even more surprised at Denise's idea, and her bold proceedings, than her grandfather had been. He would never have imagined that she was capable of such a step, she looked so timid and so innocent, and was seemingly a mere child. He was about to compliment her when she interrupted him eagerly, saying,—"There is nothing to boast of. I ran no risk."

"A very substantial risk, mademoiselle, I assure you."

"Pshaw!" exclaimed M. de Chandore.

"To bribe an official," continued M. Folgat, "is a very grave offence. The Criminal Code has a certain paragraph No. 179, which punishes the person who bribes, as well as the person who is bribed."

"Well, so much the better!" cried Denise. "If poor M. Méchinét has to go to prison, I'll go with him!" And, without noticing her grandfather's dissatisfied expression, she added, turning to M. Folgat,—*"After all, sir, you see your wishes have been fulfilled. We shall be able to communicate with M. de Boiscorán: he will give us his instructions."*

"Perhaps so, mademoiselle."

"How? Perhaps? You said yourself—"

"I told you, mademoiselle, it would be useless, perhaps even imprudent, to take any steps before we knew the truth. But shall we know it? Do you think that M. de Boiscorán, who has good reasons for being suspicious of everything, will at once tell us everything in a letter which must needs pass through several hands before it can reach us?"

"He will tell us all, sir, without reserve, without fear, and without danger."

"Oh!"

"I have taken my precautions. You will see."

"Then we have only to wait."

Alas, yes! They had to wait, and that was what most distressed Denise. She hardly slept that night. The next day was one of unbroken torment. At each ring of the bell she trembled, and ran to see who was at the door. At last, towards five o'clock, nothing having come, she exclaimed, "It is not to be to-day. I pray, O God! that poor Méchinét has not been caught."

And, perhaps in order to escape for a time the anguish of her fears, she agreed to accompany Jacques's mother who had to pay some visits. Ah, if she had but known! She had not left the house ten minutes, when a street-boy arrived with a letter addressed to her. The missive was taken to M. de Chandore, who happened to be walking in the garden with M. Folgat.

"A letter for Denise!" exclaimed the old gentleman, as soon as the servant had disappeared. "Here is the answer we have been waiting for!"

He boldly tore it open. Alas! it was useless to have done so. The note within the envelope ran as follows:—

“31 : 9, 17, 19, 23, 25, 28, 32, 101, 102, 129, 137, 504,
515—37 : 2, 3, 4, 5, 7, 8, 10, 11, 13, 14, 24, 27, 52, 54,
118, 119, 120, 200, 201,—41 : 7, 9, 17, 21, 22, 44, 45,
46—”

And so on, for two pages.

“Look at this, and try and make it out,” said M. de Chandore, handing the letter to M. Folgat.

The lawyer actually did try; but, after five minutes’ useless efforts, he remarked, “I understand now why Mademoiselle de Chandore promised that we should know the truth. M. de Boiscoran and she have formerly corresponded with each other in cipher.”

Grandpapa Chandore raised his hands to heaven. “Just think of these little girls!” he said. “Here we are utterly helpless without her, for she alone can translate these hieroglyphics.”

If Denise had hoped, by accompanying the marchioness on her visits; to escape from the sad presentiments that oppressed her, she was cruelly disappointed; for all the people they saw received then in the most gloomy fashion, offering to condole with them in their grief; but studiously refraining from uttering a single word of hope or encouragement. Indeed, it seemed as if they all believed Jacques to be guilty. To crown everything a boy in the street exclaimed:—“O mamma, come quick! Here are the murderer’s mother and his sweetheart!”

Thus Denise returned home more downcast than ever. But on hearing that her grandfather and the lawyer from Paris were waiting for her in the baron’s study, she hastened there without stopping to take off her bonnet; and it was with a cry of delight that she heard M. de Chandore exclaim:—“Here is your answer.”

Rapidly touching the letter with her lips, she repeated;—“Now we are safe, quite safe!”

M. de Chandore smiled at his granddaughter’s happiness. “But, Miss Hypocrite,” he said, “it seems you had great secrets to communicate to M. de Boiscoran, since you resorted to cipher, like an arch conspirator;

M. Folgat and I tried to read your answer ; but it was all Greek to us."

Now only did Denise remember M. Folgat's presence, and, blushing deeply, she said,—“Latterly Jacques and I had been discussing various methods of secret correspondence, and he taught me one of them out of fun. Two people choose any book they like, and each takes a copy of the same edition. The writer looks in his volume for the words he wants, and numbers them ; his correspondent finding them out by the aid of these numbers. Thus in Jacques's letters, the numbers followed by a colon refer to the page, and the others to the order in which the words come."

"Ah, ah!" said Grandpapa Chandore, "I might have looked a long time."

"It is a very simple method," replied Denise, "very well known, and still quite safe. How could an outsider guess what book has been chosen? Then there are other means to mislead indiscreet people. It may be agreed upon, for instance, that the numbers shall never have their apparent value, or that they shall vary according to the day of the month or the week. Thus to-day is Monday, the first day of the week. Well, I have to deduct one from each number of a page, and add one to each number of a word."

"And you will be able to make it all out?" asked M. de Chandore.

"Certainly, dear grandpapa. Ever since Jacques explained it to me, I have tried to learn it as a matter of course. We chose a book which I am very fond of, Cooper's 'Spy;' and we amused ourselves by writing endless letters. Oh! it is very amusing, but it takes time, because one does not always find the words that are needed, and then they have to be spelled letter by letter."

"And has M. de Boiscoran a copy of Cooper's novel in his prison?" asked M. Folgat.

"Yes, sir, M. Mechinet told me so. As soon as Jacques found he was to be kept in solitary confinement, he asked for some of Cooper's novels; and M. Galpin, who is so cunning, so smart, and so suspicious, went himself and got them for him. Jacques was counting upon me."

"Then, dear child, go and read your letter, and solve the riddle," said M. de Chandore, who, when she had left, added to his companion,—“How she loves him! How

she loves this man Jacques! Sir, if anything should happen to him, she would die."

M. Folgat made no reply; and nearly an hour passed, before Denise, shut up in her room, had succeeded in finding all the words of which Jacques's letter was composed. When she returned to her grandfather's study, her face bore an expression of most profound despair. "This is horrible," she said.

Had Jacques confessed?—That same idea at once crossed the minds of M. de Chandore and M. Folgat.

"Look, read yourself!" said Denise, handing them the translation, which ran as follows:—

"Thanks for your letter, my darling. A presentiment had warned me, and I had asked for a copy of 'The Spy.' I understand but too well how grieved you must be at seeing me kept in prison without my making an effort to establish my innocence. I kept silence, because I hoped the proof of my innocence would come from outside. I see that it would be madness to hope so any longer, and that I must speak. I shall speak. But what I have to say is so very serious, that I shall keep silent until I shall have had an opportunity of consulting with some one in whom I can feel perfect confidence. Prudence alone is not enough now; skill also is required. Until now I felt secure, relying on my innocence. But the last examination has opened my eyes, and I now see the danger to which I am exposed.

"I shall suffer terribly until I can see a lawyer. Thank my mother for having brought one. I hope he will pardon me, if I apply first to another man. I want a man who knows our district and its customs.

"That is why I have chosen M. Magloire; and I beg you will tell him to hold himself ready for the day when, the examination being complete, I shall be relieved from solitary confinement.

"Until then, nothing can be done, nothing unless you can get the case taken out of M. G. D.—'s hands, and given to some one else. That man acts infamously. He wants me to be guilty. He would himself commit a crime in order to fasten it on me, and there is no kind of trap he does not lay for me. I have the greatest difficulty in con-

trolling myself every time I see this man, who was my friend and is now my accuser, enter my cell.

"Ah, dear ones ! I pay a heavy price for a fault of which I have been, until now, almost unconscious.

"And you, my only friend, will you ever be able to forgive me the terrible anxiety I cause you ?

"I should like to say much more ; but the prisoner who has handed me your note says I must be quick, and it takes so much time to pick out the words ! J."

When the letter had been read, M. de Folgat and M. de Chandore sadly turned their heads aside, fearing lest Denise should read in their eyes the secret of their thoughts.

She perceived the gesture and guessed its meaning ; "You cannot doubt Jacques, grandpapa !" she cried.

"No," murmured the old gentleman feebly, "no."

"And you, M. Folgat—are you hurt by Jacques's desire to consult another lawyer ?"

"I should have been the first, mademoiselle, to advise him to consult a member of the local bar."

Denise had to summon all her energy to check her tears. "Yes," she said, "this letter is terrible ; but how can it be otherwise ? Don't you see that Jacques is in despair, that his mind wanders after all these fearful shocks ?"

Somebody knocked gently at the door. "It is I," said the marchioness.

Grandpapa Chandore, M. Folgat, and Denise looked at each other for a moment. Then the advocate suddenly said,—*"The situation is too serious : we must consult the marchioness."* He rose to open the door ; and Madame de Boiscoran entered the room. A servant had informed her that M. de Chandore, his granddaughter, and the lawyer were closeted together in the study, and fearing some fresh complication, she had hastened downstairs.

"I mean to know all !" she exclaimed, crossing the threshold.

Denise at once stepped forward and replied :—"Whatever you may hear, my dear mother, pray remember, that if you mention a single word to any one, you may ruin an honest man, who has put us all under obligations that can never be fully discharged. I have been fortunate enough

to establish a correspondence with Jacques. I have written to him, and I have received his answer. Here it is."

The marchioness was almost beside herself, and eagerly snatched at the letter. But, as she read it, the blood receded from her face, her eyes grew dim, her lips turned pale, and at last her breath failed to come. The letter slipped from her trembling hands; she sank into a chair, and stammered, "It is useless to struggle any longer: we are lost!"

There was something superb in Denise's gesture, and the admirable accent of her voice, as she replied:—"Why not say at once, my mother, that Jacques is an incendiary and an assassin?" Then raising her head with an air of dauntless energy, with trembling lips, and eyes full of wrath and disdain, she added,—“And do I really remain the only one to defend him,—to defend one, who, in his days of prosperity, had so many friends? Well, so be it!”

Naturally, M. Folgat had been less deeply moved than either the marchioness or M. de Chandore; hence he was also the first to recover his calmness. “We shall be two, mademoiselle, at all events,” he said; “for I should never forgive myself, if I allowed myself to be influenced by that letter. I know by experience what your heart has told you instinctively. Imprisonment may affect the strongest and firmest of minds. The days spent in prison are interminable, and the nights have nameless terrors. The innocent man in his lonely cell feels as if he were becoming guilty, just as the man of the soundest intellect would begin to doubt himself in a madhouse—”

Denise did not let him conclude. “That is exactly what I felt, sir,” she cried, “but I could not express it as clearly as you do.”

Ashamed at their lack of courage, M. de Chandore and the marchioness made an effort to recover from the doubts which, for a moment, had well-nigh overcome them. “But what is to be done?” asked the old lady.

“Your son tells us, madame, we have only to wait for the end of the preliminary examination.”

“I beg your pardon,” said M. de Chandore, “we have to try to get the case handed over to another magistrate.”

M. Folgat shook his head. “Unfortunately, that is not to be dreamt of. A magistrate acting in his official capacity cannot be rejected like a simple juryman. Thus Article 542

of the Criminal Code says, that any demand to change an examining magistrate can only be entertained by a Court of Appeal, because the magistrate, within his legitimate sphere, is a court in himself. Besides, a demand for M. Galpin's removal would not prevent him from carrying on his proceedings? He would go on until the decision came from the Court of Appeal. He could, it is true, issue no final order; but that is the very thing M. de Boiscoran ought to desire, since such an order would put an end to his solitary confinement, and enable him to see an advocate."

"That is atrocious!" murmured M. de Chandore.

"It is atrocious, indeed; but such are the laws of France."

"I understand you perfectly now," observed Denise, "and to-morrow your objections shall be made known to M. de Boiscoran."

"Above all," said the lawyer, "explain to him clearly that any such steps as he proposes to take will turn to his disadvantage. M. Galpin-Daveline is our enemy; but we can make no specific charge against him. People would always reply, 'If M. de Boiscoran is innocent, why doesn't he speak out?'"

Grandpapa Chandore would not admit this. "Still," he said, "what if we could bring influential men to help us?"

"Can you?"

"Certainly! The marquis has old friends, who, no doubt, are still all-powerful under the present government. He was, in former years, very intimate with M. de Margeril."

M. Folgat's face brightened. "Ah," he said, "if M. de Margeril would give us a lift! But he is not easily approached."

"We might at least send the marquis to see him, since he remained in Paris for the purpose of assisting us there; now he will have his opportunity. I will write to him to-night."

At the mention of M. de Margeril, the marchioness had become, if possible, paler than ever. At the old gentleman's last words she rose, exclaiming: "Do not write: it would be useless. I do not wish it."

Her embarrassment was so evident, that the others were

quite surprised. "Have the marquis and M. de Margeril quarrelled?" asked M. de Chandore.

"Yes."

"But," cried Denise, "it is a matter of life and death for Jacques."

Alas! The poor woman could not reveal what suspicions had darkened her husband's life. "If it is absolutely necessary," she said, with a half-stifled voice, "if that is our very last hope, then I will go and see M. de Margeril myself."

M. Folgat was the only one who suspected that the marchioness might be harassed by some painful memory. He interposed, therefore, saying,—“At all events, my advice is to await the end of the preliminary investigation. I may be mistaken, however; and, before any answer is sent to M. Jacques, I desire that the advocate to whom he alludes should be consulted.”

"That is certainly the wisest plan," said M. de Chandore. And, ringing for a servant, he at once sent him to ask M. Magloire to call after dinner.

In selecting this lawyer as his counsel, Jacques de Bois-coran had acted wisely. M. Magloire was looked upon in Sauveterre as the most eloquent and most skilful advocate, not only of the district, but of the whole province of Poitou. He had, besides, the reputation of being unsurpassed in integrity and a sense of honour. It was well known that he never consented to plead a doubtful cause, unless convinced of his client's innocence, and there were stories of his having thrown clients out of the window, for coming to him, money in hand, and asking him to undertake an unclean case.

Marrying at an early age, M. Magloire had lost his wife after a few months' wedlock, and had never recovered from the loss. Regularly, on certain days, he was seen wending his way to the cemetery, to place flowers on his wife's modest grave. The folks of Sauveterre would have laughed at any one else for displaying such attachment; but with M. Magloire it was different. Young and old knew and revered the tall man with the calm, serene face, the clear, bright eyes, and eloquent lips, which, in their well-cut, delicate lines, expressed scorn, tenderness, or disdain by turns.

Like Dr. Seignebos, M. Magloire was also a Republi-

can; and, at the last elections under the Empire, the Bonapartists had had the greatest trouble to keep him out of the Chamber, despite all the government influence of which they disposed. Nor would they have been successful after all, but for the Count de Claudieuse, who prevailed upon a number of electors to abstain from voting.

This, then, was the man, who, towards nine o'clock, presented himself at M. de Chandore's house, where he was anxiously expected by all the inmates. His greeting was affectionate, but at the same time so sad, that it touched Denise's heart painfully. She thought she saw that M. Magloire was not far from believing Jacques guilty. And she was not mistaken; for M. Magloire let them see it clearly, in the most delicate manner, to be sure, but still so as to leave no doubt. He had spent the day in court, and had heard the opinions of both bench and bar, which were by no means favourable to the accused. Under such circumstances, it would have evidently been a great blunder to apply for M. Galpin's removal.

"But the investigation will last a year," cried Denise, "since M. Galpin is determined to make Jacques confess a crime which he has not committed."

M. Magloire shook his head. "I believe, on the contrary," he replied, "that the investigation will be very soon concluded."

"But if Jacques keeps silent?"

"Neither the silence of an accused, nor any other caprice or obstinacy of his, can interfere with the regular course. Called upon to produce his justification, if he refuses to do so, the law proceeds without him."

"Still, sir, if an accused person has reasons—"

"There are no reasons which can force a man to let himself be accused unjustly. But even that case has been foreseen. The accused is at liberty not to answer a question which may inculcate him. *Nemo tenetur prodere se ipsum*. But you must admit that such a refusal to answer justifies a judge in believing that the charges which the accused does not refute are true."

The distinguished lawyer's calmness terrified all his listeners, except M. Folgat. When they heard him make use of technical terms, they felt chilled through and through, like the friends of a wounded man who hear the grating of the surgeon's knife.

"My son's situation appears very serious, sir, to you?" suggested the marchioness in a feeble voice.

"I said it was dangerous, madame."

"You think, as M. Folgat does, that every day adds to the danger to which he is exposed?"

"I am but too sure of that. And if M. de Boiscoran is really innocent—"

"Ah, M. Magloire!" cried Denise, "how can you, one of Jacques's friends, speak thus?"

M. Magloire looked at Denise with an air of deep and sincere pity. "It is precisely because I am his friend," he said, "that I am bound to tell you the truth. Yes, I know and I appreciate all the noble qualities which distinguish M. de Boiscoran. I have loved him, and I love him still. But this is a matter which we have to look at with the mind, and not with the heart. Jacques is a man: and he will be judged by men. There is clear, public, and absolute evidence of his guilt on hand. What evidence has he to offer of his innocence? Moral evidence only."

"My God!" murmured Denise.

"I think, therefore, with my honourable brother"—and here M. Magloire bowed to M. Folgat. "I think, that, if M. de Boiscoran is innocent, he has adopted an unfortunate system. Ah! if luckily there should be an *alibi*, he ought to make haste to establish it. He ought not to allow matters to go on till he is sent into court. Arrived there, the accused is three-fourths condemned already."

For once it seemed as if the crimson in M. de Chandore's cheeks was growing pale. "And yet," he exclaimed, "Jacques will not change in system: any one who knows his mulish obstinacy might be quite sure of that."

"And unfortunately he has made up his mind," said Denise, "as M. Magloire, who knows him so well, will see from this letter of his."

Until now nothing had transpired to let the Sauveterre lawyer suspect that communications had been opened with the prisoner. The letter, however, having been alluded to, it became necessary to take him into confidence at first he was astonished, then he looked displeased; and, when he had been told everything, he exclaimed,—“This is a great imprudence! This is too daring!” Then looking at M. Folgat, he added,—“Our profession has certain rules

which cannot be broken without causing trouble. To bribe a clerk, to profit by his weakness and his sympathy—”

The Parisian advocate blushed imperceptibly,—“I should never have advised such imprudence,” he interposed, “but, when it was once committed, I did not feel bound to insist upon its being abandoned : and even if I should be blamed for it, or more, I mean to profit by it.”

M. Magloire made no reply ; but, after reading Jacques’s letter, he said,—“ I am at M. de Boiscoran’s disposal , and will go to him as soon as he is no longer in solitary confinement. I think, with Mademoiselle Denise, that he will persist in saying nothing. However, as we have the means of reaching him by letter,—well, here I am myself ready to profit by the imprudence that has been committed !—beseech him, in the name of his own interest, in the name of all that is dear to him, to speak, explain, and prove his innocence.”

Thereupon M. Magloire bowed, and abruptly withdrew, leaving his audience in consternation ; for it was evident that his sudden departure was meant to conceal the painful impression which Jacques’s letter had produced upon him.

“Certainly,” said M. de Chandore, “we will write to him ; but we might just as well whistle. He will wait for the end of the investigation.”

“Who knows ?” murmured Denise, and, after a moment’s reflection, she added,—“We can try, however.” Then, without vouchsafing any further explanation, she left the room, and hastened to her own apartment, where she wrote the following letter :—

“ I must speak to you. There is a little gate in our garden which opens into the Ruelle de la Charite. I will wait for you there. However late it may be when you get these lines, come !—
DENISE.”

Having put this note into an envelope, she called the old nurse who waited on her, and, with all the recommendations which prudence could suggest, instructed her to let M. Mechinet, the clerk, have it that very night without loss of time.

IX.

DURING the last twenty-four hours, Mechinet had changed so much, that his sisters recognised him no longer. Immediately after Denise's departure, they had hurried to his room, hoping to hear all about that mysterious interview ; but at the first word they ventured, he cried out in a tone of voice which quite frightened them,—“That is none of your business ! That is nobody's business !” Left alone, he remained quite overcome by his adventure, and pondered as to how he should make good his promise without ruining himself. It was indeed no easy matter.

When the decisive moment arrived, he discovered that he should never be able to get the note into M. de Boiscoran's hands, without being caught by the lynx-eyed M. Galpin-Daveline, and as the letter was burning in his pocket, he found himself compelled, after long hesitation, to appeal for help to the man who waited on Jacques—in a word, to Frumence Cheminot. The latter was, after all, not such a bad fellow ; his only besetting sin being unconquerable laziness, and his only crime, in the eyes of the law, perpetual vagrancy. He was attached to Mechinet, who upon former occasions, when he was in jail, had given him tobacco, or a few coppers to buy a glass of wine. He made no objections, therefore, when the clerk asked him to give M. de Boiscoran a letter, and bring back an answer. He acquitted himself, moreover, faithfully and honestly of his errand. But, because everything had gone well once, it did not follow that Mechinet felt quite at peace. Besides being tormented by the thought that he had betrayed his duty, he felt wretched in being at the mercy of an accomplice. How easily might he not be betrayed ! An indiscretion, a blunder, an accident, might ruin him !

He would lose his place and all his other employments, one by one. He would lose confidence and consideration. Farewell to all ambitious dreams, all hopes of wealth, all dreams of an advantageous marriage. And still, by an odd contradiction, Mechinet did not repent what he had done, and felt quite ready to do it over again. He was in this state of mind when the old nurse brought him Denise's letter.

“What again ?” he exclaimed, but when he had read

the note, he replied,—“Tell your mistress I will be there!” In his heart he thought some untoward event must have happened.

The little gate was ajar, and he had only to push it back to enter M. de Chandore's garden. There was no moon; but the night was clear, and under the trees, at a short distance from him, he recognised Denise, and went towards her. “Pardon me, sir,” she at once said, “for having ventured to send for you.”

Mechinet's anxiety vanished instantly. He no longer thought of his strange position. His vanity was flattered by the confidence shown him by this young lady, whom he knew very well as the noblest, the most beautiful, and the richest heiress in the province. “You were quite right to send for me, mademoiselle,” he remarked, “if I can be of any service to you.”

In a few words, she had told him all, and then asked his advice.

“I am entirely of M. Folgat's opinion,” he replied. “I think that grief and isolation begin to have their effect upon M. de Boiscoran's mind.”

“Oh, that thought is maddening!” murmured the poor girl.

“I think, as M. Magloire does, that M. de Boiscoran, by his silence, only makes his situation worse. I have a proof of it. M. Galpin, who, at first, was all doubt and anxiety, is now quite re-assured. The attorney-general has written him a letter, in which he compliments his energy.”

“And then?”

“Then we must induce M. de Boiscoran to speak. I know very well that he is firmly resolved not to speak; but if you were to write to him, since you can write to him—”

“A letter would be useless.”

“But—”

“Useless, I tell you. But I know a means.”

“You must use it promptly, mademoiselle. Do not lose a moment. There is no time—”

The night was clear, but not clear enough for the clerk to see how very pale Denise was. “Well, then, I must see M. de Boiscoran: I must speak to him,” she said.

She expected the clerk to start, to cry out, to protest.

Far from it : he observed in the quietest tone,—“ Yes, to be sure ; but how ? ”

“ Blangin, the keeper, and his wife, retain their places only because they are dependent on them for support. Why might I not offer them, in return for an interview with M. de Boiscoran, the means to go and live in the country ? ”

“ Why not ? ” asked the clerk. And in a lower voice, replying to the voice of his conscience, he went on,—“ The jail in Sauveterre is not at all like the police-stations and prisons of larger towns. The prisoners are few in number : they are scarce guarded. When the doors are shut, Blangin is master within.”

“ I will go and see him to-morrow,” declared Denise.

Once on certain slopes, you are impelled downwards. Having yielded to Denise's first suggestions, Mechinet had, unconsciously, bound himself to her forever. “ No, do not go there, mademoiselle,” he said. “ You could not make Blangin believe that he runs no danger : nor could you sufficiently arouse his cupidity. I will speak to him myself.”

“ Oh, sir ! ” exclaimed Denise, “ how can I ever ?—”

“ How much may I offer him ? ” asked the clerk.

“ Whatever you think proper—anything.”

“ Then, mademoiselle, I will bring you an answer to-morrow, here, and at the same hour.”

And away he went, leaving Denise so buoyed up by hope, that all the evening, and the next day, her aunts and the marchioness, not being in the secret, asked each other incessantly,—“ What can be the matter with the child ? ”

She, on her side, was thinking that, if the answer were favourable, ere twenty-four hours had gone by, she would see Jacques ; and she kept on saying to herself,—“ If only Mechinet is punctual ! ”

He was so. At ten o'clock precisely, he pushed open the little gate, just as on the night before, and hastily exclaimed,—“ It is all right ! ”

Denise was so terribly excited that she had to lean for support against a tree.

“ Blangin agrees,” the clerk went on. “ I promised him sixteen thousand francs. It is a good deal.”

“ It is very little.”

“ He insists upon having it in gold.”

"So he shall."

"Finally, he makes certain conditions with regard to the interview which will appear rather hard to you."

By this time Denise had quite recovered. "What are they?" she asked.

"Blangin has to take all possible precautions against detection, although, of course, he is quite prepared for the worst. He has arranged matters in this way: To-morrow evening at six o'clock you will pass by the jail. The door will be open, and Blangin's wife, whom you know very well, as she was formerly in your service, will be standing on the threshold. If she does not speak to you, keep on your way, something will have happened. If she does speak to you, go in with her, quite alone, and she will show you into a small room adjoining her own. There you will stay, till Blangin, perhaps at a late hour, thinks he can safely take you to M. de Boiscoran's cell. When the interview is over, you must come back into the little room, where a bed will be ready for you, and you must spend the night there; this is the hardest part of it; you cannot leave the prison till the next day."

This was certainly terrible; still, after a moment's reflection, Denise replied,—“Never mind! I accept. Tell Blangin that it is all right.”

That Denise should accept all Blangin's conditions was perfectly natural; but to obtain M. de Chandore's consent was a far more difficult task. Denise understood this so well, that, for the first time in her life, she felt embarrassed in her grandfather's presence. She hesitated, she prepared her little speech, and she selected her words carefully. But in spite of all her skill, in spite of the art with which she managed to present her strange request, M. de Chandore had no sooner understood her project than he exclaimed,—“Never, never, never!”

Perhaps in his whole life the old gentleman had never expressed himself in so positive a manner. His brow had never looked so dark. Usually, when his granddaughter had a petition to present, his lips might say “No;” but his eyes always said “Yes.”

“Impossible!” he repeated, and in a tone of voice which seemed to admit of no reply.

Surely, in all these painful events he had not spared himself, and he had done for Denise all that she could possibly

expect of him. Her will had been his will. As she had prompted, he had said "Yes," or "No." What more could he have said or done?

Without telling him what they were wanted for, Denise had asked him to give her a hundred and twenty thousand francs, and he had given them to her—large as the sum would have been anywhere, immense as it surely was in a little town like Sauveterre. And he was quite ready to give her as much again, or twice as much, without asking any more questions. But for Denise to leave her home one evening at six o'clock, and not return till the next morning—"That I cannot permit," he repeated.

For Denise to spend a night in the Sauveterre jail, in order to have an interview with her betrothed, who was accused of incendiarism and murder; to remain there all night, alone, absolutely at the mercy of the keeper, a hard, coarse, covetous man—"That I will never permit," exclaimed the old gentleman once more.

Denise remained calm, and let the storm pass by. When her grandfather became silent, she said, "But if I must?"

M. de Chandore shrugged his shoulders, whereupon she repeated in a louder tone,—“If I must, in order to decide Jacques to abandon this system that will ruin him, to induce him to speak before the investigation is completed?”

"That is not your business, my child," said the old gentleman.

"Oh!"

"That is the business of his mother, the Marchioness de Boiscoran. Whatever Blangin agrees to venture for your sake, he will do for hers. Let the marchioness go and spend the night at the jail. I agree to that. Let her see her son. That is her duty."

"But surely she will never shake Jacques's resolution?"

"And you think you have more influence over him than his mother?"

"It is not the same thing, dear grandpapa."

"Never mind!"

This "never mind" of Grandpapa Chandore's was as positive as his "impossible;" but he had begun to discuss the question, and to discuss means to listen to arguments on the other side. "Do not insist, my dear child," he said again. "My mind is made up; and I assure you—"

"Don't say so, grandpapa," said the young girl. And her attitude was so determined, and her voice so firm, that the old gentleman was quite overwhelmed for a moment.

"But, if I am not willing," he said.

"You will consent, dear grandpapa, you will certainly not force your little granddaughter, who loves you so dearly, to the painful necessity of disobeying you for the first time in her life."

"Because, for the first time in her life, I am not doing what my granddaughter wants me to do?"

"Dear grandpa, let me tell you—"

"Rather listen to me, poor dear child, and let me show you to what dangers, to what misfortunes, you expose yourself. To go and spend a night at that prison would be risking (understand me well) your honour,—that tender delicate honour, which is tarnished by a breath, which involves the happiness and peace of your whole life."

"But Jacques's honour and life are at stake."

"Poor imprudent girl! How do you know but that he would be the very first to blame you cruelly for such a step?"

"He?"

"Men are so made: the most perfect devotion irritates them at times."

"Be it so. I would rather endure Jacques's unjust reproaches than the idea of not having done my duty."

M. de Chandore began to despair. "And if instead of commanding I were to beg of you, Denise? If your old grandfather were to beseech you on his knees to abandon your fatal project?"

"You would cause me much anguish, grandpapa: but it would be all in vain; for I must resist your prayers, as I must resist your orders."

"Inexorable!" murmured the old gentleman. "She is immovable!" Then suddenly changing his tone, he cried,—
—"But, after all, I am master here."

"Grandpapa, pray!"

"And since nothing can move you, I will speak to Mechinet, I will let Blangin know my will."

Denise, turning as pale as death, but with burning eyes, drew back a step, and said,—
—"If you do that, grandpapa, if you destroy my last hope—"

"Well?"

"I swear to you by the sacred memory of my mother, that I will be in a convent to-morrow, where you would never see me again in your life, not even if I should die, which would certainly soon happen—"

M. de Chandore, raising his hands to heaven, and with an accent of genuine despair, exclaimed,—*"Ah, my God ! Are these our children ? And is this what is in store for us old people ? We have spent a lifetime in watching over them : we have submissively gratified all their fancies ; they have been our greatest anxiety, and our sweetest hope ; we have given them our life day by day, and we should not hesitate to give them our life's blood drop by drop ; they are everything to us, and we imagine they love us—poor fools that we are ! One fine day, a man goes by, a careless thoughtless man, with a bright eye and a ready tongue, and it is all over. Our child is no longer our own ; our child no longer knows us. Go, old man, and die in your corner."*

Overwhelmed by his grief, the old man staggered, and sank into a chair, as an old oak, cut by the woodman's axe, might tremble and fall.

"Ah, this is fearful !" murmured Denise. "What you say, grandpapa, is too fearful. How can you doubt me ?"

She had knelt down. She was weeping ; and her hot tears fell upon the old gentleman's hands. He started up as he felt them ; and making one more effort, he said,—*"Poor, poor child ! And suppose Jacques is guilty, and when he sees you, confesses his crime, what then ?"*

Denise shook her head. "That is impossible," she said ; "and still, even if it were so, I ought to be punished as much as he is ; for I know, if he had asked me, I should have acted in concert with him."

"She is mad !" exclaimed M. de Chandore, falling back into his chair. "She is mad ?"

But he was overcome ; and the next day, at five in the afternoon, his heart torn by unspeakable grief, he went down the steep street with his daughter on his arm. Denise had chosen her simplest and plainest dress ; and the little bag she carried on her arm contained not sixteen but twenty thousand francs. As a matter of course, it had been necessary to take the marchioness into their confidence : but neither she nor the Demoiselles de Lavarande, nor M. Folgat, had raised an objection. Grandfather and

grandchild walked down to the prison without exchanging a word : but as they approached their destination Denise exclaimed :—"I see Madame Blangin at the door : let us be careful."

They came nearer, Madame Blangin saluted them.

"Come, it is time," said Denise. "Till to-morrow, dear grandpapa ! Go home quickly, and don't be anxious about me."

Then joining the keeper's wife, she disappeared inside the prison.

X

THE prison of Sauveterre forms part of the castle at the upper end of the town, in a poor and almost deserted quarter. This castle, once of great importance, was dismantled at the time of the siege of La Rochelle ; and all that now remains of it are the ruined ramparts with their filled-up moats, an old gate surmounted by a small belfry, a chapel converted into a magazine, and finally two huge towers connected by a large building, the lower rooms of which are vaulted. Nothing can be more mournful than these ruins, enclosed with an ivy-covered wall ; and nothing would indicate the use that is made of them, were it not for the sentinel standing day and night at the gate. Ancient elm-trees overshadow the vast courts ; and enough flowers to rejoice a hundred prisoners bloom on the old walls. Still this romantic prison is without prisoners.

"It is a cage without birds," says the jailer often in his most melancholy voice. He takes advantage of this circumstance to raise his vegetables all over the courts, and the aspect is so favourable that he is always ready the first in Sauveterre with his green peas. With the leave of the authorities, he has also fitted up very comfortable lodgings for himself in one of the towers. He has two rooms below, and a chamber on the first floor, reached by a narrow staircase in the wall. It was to this chamber that the keeper's wife conducted Denise with all the promptness of fear. The poor girl was out of breath. Her heart was beating violently ; and, as soon as she reached the room she sank into a chair.

"Good heavens !" cried the woman. "You are not ill, my dear young lady ? Wait, I'll run for some vinegar."

"Never mind," replied Denise in a feeble voice. "Stay here, my dear Colette ; don't go away !"

Colette was nearly forty-five, as dark as gingerbread, moreover, and with a decided moustache on her upper lip. "Poor young lady !" she said. "You feel unwell at being here."

"Yes," replied Denise. "But where is your husband ?"

"Down stairs, on the look-out, mademoiselle. He will come up directly."

As she spoke, a heavy step was heard on the stairs : and Blangin entered, looking pale and anxious, like a man who feels that he is running a great risk. "Neither seen nor known," he cried. "No one is aware of your presence here. I was only afraid of that dog of a sentinel ; and, just as you came by, I had managed to get him round the corner by offering him a drop of something to drink. I begin to hope I shall not lose my place."

Denise accepted these last words as a summons to speak out. "Ah !" she said, "never mind your place : you know I have promised you a better one ?" And then with affected gaiety she opened her little bag, and put the rolls that it contained upon the table.

"Ah, that is gold !" said Blangin with eager eyes.

"Yes. Each one of these rolls contains a thousand francs ; and here are sixteen."

The keeper was seized with an irresistible temptation. "May I look at them ?" he asked.

"Certainly !" replied Denise. "Examine and count for yourself."

She had misunderstood him. Blangin did not care about counting them, not he. What he wanted was to feast his eyes on this gold, to hear its sound, and to handle it.

With feverish eagerness he tore the paper open, and let the pieces fall upon the table ; and, as the heap increased, his lips became blanched, and a cold perspiration broke out on his temples. "And all that is for me ?" he said with a stupid laugh.

"Yes, it is all yours," replied Denise.

"I did not know how sixteen thousand francs would look. How beautiful gold is. Come and see, wife."

But Colette turned her head away. She was quite as covetous as her husband, and perhaps even more excited, but she was a woman, and knew how to dissemble. "Ah,

my dear young lady!" she said, "never would my old man and myself have asked you for money, if we had only ourselves to think of. But we have children."

"Your duty is to think of your children," replied Denise.

"I know sixteen thousand francs is a big sum. Perhaps you will be sorry to give us so much money."

"I am not sorry at all: I would even add to it willingly." And she showed them one of the other four rolls in her bag.

"Then, to be sure, what do I care for my place!" cried Blangin. And, intoxicated by the sight and the touch of the gold he added, "You are at home here, mademoiselle; and the jail and the jailer are at your disposal. What do you desire? Just speak. I have nine prisoners, not counting M. de Boiscoran and Frumence. Do you want me to set them all free?"

"Blangin!" said his wife reprovingly.

"What? Am I not free to let the prisoners go?"

"Before you play the master, wait, at least, till you have rendered our young lady the service she expects from you."

"Certainly."

"Then go and conceal this money," said the prudent woman; "or it might betray us."

And, drawing from her cupboard a woollen stocking, she handed it to her husband, who slipped the sixteen thousand francs into it, retaining about a dozen gold pieces, which he put in his pocket, so as always to have some tangible evidence of his new wealth. When the stocking, full to overflowing, had been put back in the cupboard under a pile of linen, Madame Blangin ordered her husband to go down again, as some one might come, and if he were not there to open the gate, it might look suspicious.

Like a well-trained husband, Blangin obeyed without saying a word; and then his wife bethought herself how to entertain Denise. She hoped, she said, her dear young lady would do her the honour to take something. That would strengthen her, and, besides, help her to pass the time: for it was only seven o'clock, and Blangin could not take her to M. de Boiscoran's cell before ten, without great danger.

"But I have dined," Denise objected. "I do not want anything."

The woman insisted all the more. She remembered (God be thanked!) her dear young lady's taste; and she had prepared her an admirable broth, and some beautiful dessert. And, while thus talking, she set the table, having made up her mind that Denise must eat at all hazards. The woman's eager zeal had, at least, this advantage,—it prevented Denise from giving way to her painful thoughts.

Night at length arrived. It was nine o'clock; then it struck ten. At last, the watch came round to relieve the sentinels, and a quarter of an hour afterwards, Blangin reappeared, carrying a lantern and an enormous bunch of keys.

"I have sent Frumence to bed," he said. "You can come now, mademoiselle."

"Let us go," Denise simply said; and rising from her seat she followed the jailer along interminable passages, through a vast vaulted hall, in which their steps resounded as in a church, and finally down a long gallery, where, pointing at a massive door, through the cracks of which gleamed a ray of light, Blangin eventually exclaimed: "Here we are."

Denise seized his arm, and in an almost inaudible voice, she murmured: "Wait a moment." She was, in fact, almost overcome by so many successive emotions. She felt her legs give way under her, and her eyes become dim. In her heart she preserved all her usual energy; but if the spirit was willing, the flesh was weak, and seemed to fail her at the last moment.

"Are you ill?" asked the jailer. "What is the matter?"

She prayed God for courage and strength. Then when her prayer was finished she said, "Now, let us go in." A great noise of keys and bolts ensued, and then Blangin opened the door leading into Jacques de Boiscoran's cell.

Jacques was no longer counting the days, but the hours. He had been imprisoned on Friday morning, June 23, and this was Wednesday night, June 28. During a hundred and thirty two hours, he had been—according to Ayrault's terrible expression—"living, but struck off the roll of the living, and buried alive."

Each one of these hundred and thirty-two hours had weighed upon him like a month. He was so pale and

haggard, his hair and beard were so disordered, and his eyes shone so brightly—illuminated with the glow of fever—that one would hardly have recognised in him the happy lord of Boiscoran, free from care and trouble, upon whom fortune had ever smiled,—that haughty, sceptical young man, who from the height of the past seemed to defy the future.

The fact is that modern law has invented no more fearful suffering than what is called “solitary confinement.” Nothing is more calculated to demoralise a man, crush his will, and utterly conquer the most powerful energy. There is no struggle more distressing than that between a man accused of a crime of which he is innocent, and the examining magistrate, prepossessed in favour of his guilt—the struggle of a helpless being held by an enemy armed with unlimited power.

Stunned at first by his sudden arrest and incarceration, Jacques had soon recovered; and by Friday he had grown quiet and confident, talkative, and almost cheerful. But Sunday was a fatal day. Two gendarmes carried him off to Boiscoran to be present at the removal of the seals; and on his way he was overwhelmed with insults and curses by the people, who recognised him. He came back terribly distressed. During the whole of Monday he was tortured by the magistrate, and after six hours’ examination, when they brought him his dinner, he declared that his health could not stand it, and that they might just as well kill him at once. On Tuesday he received Denise’s letter, and answered it. This excited him fearfully, and during a part of the night Frumence saw him walk up and down his cell, with the gestures and incoherent imprecations of a madman.

He hoped for a letter on Wednesday, but none came, and he sunk into a kind of stupor, during which M. Galpin-Daveline was quite unable to draw a word from him. When the magistrate left him, he sat down facing the window, and resting his head on his elbows he remained motionless, so deeply absorbed in reverie that he took no notice when the jailer entered his cell with lights. He was still in this state, when, a little after ten o’clock, he heard the bolts of his cell being drawn back. He had become so well acquainted with the prison that he knew all its regulations. He knew at what hours his meals

were brought, at what time Frumence came to clean his room, and when he might expect the magistrate. After nightfall he knew he was his own master till the next morning. So late a visit, therefore, must needs bring him some unexpected news, his liberty, perhaps,—that visitor for whom all prisoners look so anxiously.

He started up, and as soon as he distinguished the jailer's rugged face, he asked eagerly,—“Who wants me?”

Blangin bowed, for he was a polite jailer. “Sir, I bring you a visitor,” he replied. And, moving aside, he made way for Denise, or, rather, he pushed her into the room, for she seemed to have lost all power of motion.

“A visitor?” repeated M. de Boiscoran. But the jailer had raised his lantern, and Jacques instantly recognised his betrothed. “What, you?” he cried, “you here!” And saying this he drew back, as though afraid of being deceived by a dream, or by one of those fearful hallucinations which announce the coming of insanity, and seize hold of people's brains in times of over-excitement. “Denise!” he barely whispered, “Denise!”

If Jacques's life, not her own (for she cared nothing for it), had at that moment depended on a single word, Denise could not have uttered it. Her throat was parched, and her lips refused to part. The jailer accordingly took upon himself to answer. “Yes,” he said, “it is Mademoiselle Chandore.”

“At this hour, in my prison!”

“She had something important to communicate to you. She came to me—”

“O Denise!” stammered Jacques, “what a precious friend—”

“And I agreed,” said Blangin in a paternal tone of voice, “to bring her in secretly. It is a great sin I commit; and if it should ever become known— But let one be ever so much a jailer, one has a heart, after all. I tell you so merely because the young lady might not think of it. If the secret is not kept carefully, I should lose my place, and I am a poor man, with wife and children!”

“You are the best of men!” exclaimed M. de Boiscoran, far from suspecting the price that had been paid for Blangin's sympathy, “and the day I regain my liberty, I will

prove to you that we whom you have obliged are not ungrateful."

"I am always at your service," replied the jailer modestly.

Gradually, however, Denise had recovered her self-possession. "Leave us now, my good friend," she said gently to Blangin. And as soon as the jailer had disappeared, and without allowing M. de Boiscoran to say a word, she added, speaking very low,—*"Jacques, grandpapa, has told me, that by coming thus to you at night, alone, and in secret, I run the risk of losing your affection, and of diminishing your respect."*

"Ah, you did not think so!"

"Grandpapa has more experience than I have, Jacques. Still I did not hesitate. Here I am; and I should have run much greater risks; for your honour is at stake, and your honour is my honour, as your life is my life. Your future is at stake, *our* future, our happiness, all our hopes here below."

Inexpressible joy had illumined the prisoner's face. "O God!" he cried, "one such moment repays for years of torture."

But Denise had sworn to herself, that nothing should turn her aside from her purpose. So she continued, "By my mother's sacred memory, I assure you, Jacques, I have never for a moment doubted your innocence."

The unhappy man looked distressed. "You," he said: "but the others! but M. de Chandore?"

"Do you think I should be here, if he thought you were guilty? My aunts and your mother are as sure of your innocence as I am."

"And my father? You said nothing about him in your letter."

"Your father remained in Paris in case some influence in high quarters should have to be appealed to."

Jacques looked downcast. "I am in prison at Sauverre," he said, "accused of a fearful crime, and my father remains in Paris! It must be true he never really loved me. And yet I have always been a good son to him down to this terrible catastrophe. He has never had to complain of me. No, my father does not love me."

Denise could not allow him to continue in this strain. "Listen to me, Jacques," she said; "let me tell you why

I ran the risk of taking this serious step, that may cost me so dearly. I come to you in the name of all your friends, in the name of M. Folgat, the advocate whom your mother has brought down from Paris, and in the name of M. Magloire, in whom you put so much confidence. They all agree you have adopted an abominable system. By refusing obstinately to speak, you rush voluntarily into the gravest danger. Listen well to what I tell you. If you wait till the examination is over, you are lost. If you are once handed over to the court, it is too late for you to speak. You will, innocent as you are, only make one more on the list of judicial murders."

Jacques de Boiscoran had listened in silence, his head bowed down, as if to conceal the pallor of his face from Denise. "Alas!" he murmured, when she had finished speaking, "Everything you tell me I have told myself more than once."

"And you did not speak?"

"I did not."

"Ah, Jacques, you are not aware of the danger you run! You do not know—"

"I know," he said, interrupting her in a harsh, hoarse voice,— "I know that the scaffold, or the galleys, are at the end."

Denise was petrified with horror. Poor girl! She had imagined that she would only have to show herself to triumph over Jacques's obstinacy, and that he would speedily reassure her. But matters were taking a very different course. "What a misfortune!" she cried. "You will not abandon your fearful notion; but why not? Why not speak out?"

"I cannot."

"You cannot. You have not considered—"

"Not considered," he repeated, and in a lower tone he added,— "And what do you think I have been doing during the hundred and thirty mortal hours I have been alone in this prison,—alone in the face of a terrible accusation, and a still more terrible emergency?"

"That is the difficulty, Jacques: you are the victim of your own imagination. And who could help it in your place? M. Folgat said so only yesterday. There is no man living, who, after four days' solitary confinement, can keep his mind calm. Grief and solitude are bad counsel

lors. Jacques, come to yourself; listen to your dearest friends, who speak to you through me. Jacques, your Denise beseeches you. Speak!"

"I cannot."

"Why not?" She waited for some seconds; and, as he did not reply, she asked, not without a slight accent of bitterness in her voice,—“Is it not the first duty of an innocent man to establish his innocence?"

The prisoner, with a movement of despair, clasped his hands over his brow. Then bending forward towards Denise, so that she felt his breath in her hair, he said,—“And when he cannot, when he cannot establish his innocence?"

She drew back, pale unto death, tottering so that she had to lean against the wall, and cast upon Jacques de Boiscoran a glance in which the whole horror of her soul was clearly expressed. “What do you say?" she stammered. “O God!"

He laughed, the wretched man! with that laugh which is the last utterance of despair. And then he replied,—“I say that there are circumstances which upset our reason; unheard-of circumstances, which make one doubt one's self. I say that everything accuses me, that everything overwhelms me, that everything turns against me. I say, that if I were in M. Galpin's place, and he were in mine, I should act just as he does."

"That is insanity!" cried Denise.

But Jacques de Boiscoran did not hear her. All the bitterness of the last days rose within him; and his flushed face revealed his intense excitement. “Establish my innocence!" he cried with gasping voice, “Ah! that is easily said. But how? No, I am not guilty: but a crime has been committed; and for this crime justice will have a culprit. If it is not I who fired at the Count de Claudieuse, and set Valpinson on fire, who is it? ‘Where were you,’ they ask me, ‘at the time of the murder?’ Where was I? Can I tell them? To clear myself is to accuse others. And if I should be mistaken? or if, not being mistaken, I should be unable to prove the truth of my accusation? The murderer and the incendiary, of course, took all possible precautions to escape detection, and to let punishment fall upon me. I was warned beforehand. Ah, if we always could foresee, could know beforehand! How can I

defend myself? On the first day I said, 'Such a charge cannot reach me: it is a cloud that a breath will scatter, Madman that I was! The cloud has become an avalanche, and I may be crushed. I am neither a child nor a coward; and I have always met phantoms face to face. I have measured the danger, and I know it is fearful.'

Denise shuddered. "What will become of us?" she cried.

This time, M. de Boiscoran heard her speak and felt ashamed of his weakness. But, before he could master his feelings, Denise spoke again. "But never mind," she said. "These are idle thoughts. Truth soars invincible, unchangeable, high above the ablest calculations and the most skilful combinations. Jacques, you must tell the truth, the whole truth, without subterfuge or concealment."

"I can do so no longer," murmured he.

"Is it such a terrible secret?"

"It is improbable."

Denise looked at him almost with fear. She did not recognise his old expression or the habitual tone of his voice. She drew nearer to him, and taking his hand in hers, she said,—“But you can tell it to me, your friend, your—”

He trembled, and drew back: "To you less than anybody else," he replied. Then, feeling how mortifying such an answer must be, he added,—“Your mind is too pure to understand such wretched intrigues. I do not want your wedding-dress to be stained by a speck of the mire with which they have covered me.”

Was she deceived? No; but she had the courage to appear deceived.

"Very well, then," she resumed quietly. "But the truth will have to be told, sooner or later."

"Yes, to M. Magloire."

"Well, then, Jacques, write down at once what you mean to tell him. Here are pen and ink: I will carry your statement to him faithfully."

"There are things, Denise, which cannot be written."

She felt herself vanquished; she understood that nothing would bend that resolute will, and yet she said once more,—“But if I were to beseech you, Jacques, by our past and our future, by the great and eternal love which you have sworn me?”

"Do you really wish to make my prison hours a thousand times harder than they are? Do you want to deprive me of my last remnant of strength and courage? Have you really no longer any confidence in me? Could you not believe me for a few days more?"

He paused. There was a knock at the door; and almost at the same time Blangin the jailer was heard exclaiming,—“Time is getting on. I want to be downstairs when they relieve the guard. I am running a great risk. I am the father of a family.”

“Go home now, Denise,” said Jacques eagerly, “go home, I cannot think of your being seen here.”

She had paid dear enough to know that she was quite safe in remaining; still she did not object. She offered her brow to Jacques, who touched it with his lips; and half dead, holding on to the walls, she went back to the jailer’s little room. They had made up a bed for her, and she threw herself on it, dressed as she was. There she remained immovable, as if dead, overcome by a kind of stupor, which deprived her even of the faculty of suffering.

It was bright day light, it was eight o’clock, when she felt somebody pull her sleeve, and the jailor’s wife said to her,—“My dear young lady, this would be a good time for you to slip away. Perhaps people will wonder at seeing you alone in the street; but they will think you are returning home from seven o’clock mass.”

Without saying a word, Denise sprang from the bed, and in a moment she had arranged her hair and dress. Just then Blangin entered anxious for her to leave the prison. Giving him one of the thousand-franc rolls that were still in her bag,—“This is for you,” she said. I want you to remember me, if I should need you again.” And then dropping her veil over her face, she took her departure.

XI.

THE BARON DE CHANDORE had had one terrible night in his life—a night during which he had counted each passing minute by the ebbing pulse of his only son. The physicians declared the old gentleman’s anguish to have been great on the occasion, and now, the night which Denise had passed away from the house had proved almost

as full of suffering to him. He knew very well that Blangin and his wife were honest people, in spite of their avarice and covetousness; he knew, moreover, that Jacques de Boiscoran was an honourable man. Still, all night long his old servant heard him walking up and down his room; and at seven o'clock in the morning he was at the door, looking anxiously up and down the street. Towards half-past seven M. Folgat arrived, but the baron hardly wished him good-morning, and certainly did not hear a word of what the lawyer said with the view of re-assuring him. At last, however, the old man cried,—“Ah, there she is!”

He was not mistaken. Denise was coming round the corner. She approached the house in feverish haste, as if she had known that her strength was at an end, and would barely suffice to carry her to the door.

Grandpapa Chandore met her with a kind of fierce joy, pressed her in his arms, and said over and over again,—“O Denise! oh, my darling child, how I have suffered! How long you have been! But it is all over now. Come, come, come!”

And he almost carried her into the drawing-room, and placed her tenderly on a large easy-chair. He knelt by her side, smiling with happiness; but, when he had taken her hands in his, he exclaimed:—“Your hands are burning, you are feverish!” He looked at her: she had raised her veil. “You are as pale as death!” he continued. “Your eyes are red and swollen!”

“I have been crying, dear grandpapa,” she replied gently.

“Crying! Why?”

“Alas, I have failed!”

As if moved by a sudden shock M. de Chandore sprang to his feet. “By God’s holy name,” he cried, “the like has not been heard since the world was created. What! you went, you, Denise de Chandore, to him in his prison; you begged him—”

“And he remained inflexible. Yes, dear grandpapa. He will say nothing till after the preliminary investigation is over.”

“We were mistaken in the man: he has no courage and no feeling.”

Denise had risen painfully, and said feebly,—“Ah, dear

grandpapa ! do not blame him, do not accuse him ! he is so unhappy ! ”

“ But what reasons does he give ? ”

“ He says the facts are so very improbable that he should certainly not be believed, and would ruin himself if he were to speak as long as he is kept in solitary confinement, and has no advocate. He says his position is the result of a wicked conspiracy ; that he thinks he knows the guilty person, and will denounce him, since he is forced to do so in self-defence. ”

M. Folgat, who had hitherto remained a silent witness of the scene, now approached,—“ Are you quite sure,” he asked, “ that this was what M. de Boiscoran said ? ”

“ Oh, quite certain, sir ! ”

“ But surely, my dear child,” said M. de Chandore, “ Jacques told you—you—something more precise ? ”

“ No. ”

“ You did not ask him even what those improbable facts were ? ”

“ Oh, yes ! But he said that I was the very last person who could be told. ”

“ That man ought to be burnt over a slow fire,” said M. de Chandore to himself. Then he added in a louder voice,—“ And you do not think all this very strange, very extraordinary ? ”

“ It seems to me horrible ! ”

“ I understand. But what do you think of Jacques ? ”

“ I think, dear grandpapa, that he cannot act otherwise, or he would do so. Jacques is too intelligent and too courageous to deceive himself easily. As he alone knows everything, he alone can judge. I, of course, am bound to respect his will more than anybody else. ”

But the old gentleman did not think himself bound to respect it ; and exasperated by his grandchild’s resignation, he was on the point of telling her his mind fully, when she rose with some effort, and said, in an almost inaudible voice,—“ I am so tired ! Excuse me, grandpapa, if I go to my room. ”

M. de Chandore accompanied her to the door, and watched her mount the stairs, assisted by her maid. Then he returned to M. Folgat. “ They are going to kill me, sir ! ” he cried, with an explosion of wrath and despair which was almost frightful in a man of his age. “ She

had in her eyes the same look as her mother had when she told me, after her husband's death, 'I shall not survive him.' And she did not survive my poor son. And then I, old man, was left alone with that child; and who knows but she may have in her the germ of the same disease which killed her mother? Alone! And for these twenty years I have held my breath to listen if she is still breathing naturally and regularly—"

"You are needlessly alarmed," began the advocate,

But Grandpapa Chandore shook his head. "No, no," he continued. "I fear my child has been hurt in her heart's heart. Did you not see how pale she looked, and how feeble her voice was? Great God! wilt thou leave me all alone here upon earth? For mercy's sake, call me home before she who is the joy of my life also leaves me. And I can do nothing to turn aside this fatality—stupid, insane old man that I am! And this Jacques de Boiscoran, if he were guilty, after all? Ah, the wretch! I would hang him with my own hands!"

Deeply moved, M. Folgat had silently watched the old gentleman's grief. At length he ventured to speak again,—"Do not blame M. de de Boiscoran, sir," said he, "now that everything is against him! Of all of us, he suffers the most; for he is innocent."

"Do you still think so?"

"More than ever. Little as he has said, he has told Mademoiselle Denise quite enough to confirm a conjecture I made the day we went to Boiscoran."

"I do not recollect," said the baron.

"Don't you remember," resumed the lawyer, "that you left us, so as to allow Anthony to answer my questions more freely?"

"To be sure?" cried M. de Chandore, "to be sure! And then you thought—?"

"I thought I had guessed right, you, sir; still I am not going to do anything at present. M. de Boiscoran tells us that the facts are improbable. I should, therefore, most likely soon be astray; but, since we are now bound to wait till the investigation is completed, I shall employ the time in examining the country-people, who will, probably, tell me more than Anthony did. You have, no doubt, among your friends, some who are well informed,—M. Seneschal, Dr. Seignebois, for instance,

By a singular coincidence, scarcely had the doctor's name been mentioned, than his voice was heard in the hall, and a second later, he fell like a bombshell into the room. Four days had now elapsed since he had last presented himself; for he had sent a messenger to fetch away his report and the shot he had left in M. Folgat's hands. He had spent nearly the whole of these last four days at the hospital, with one of his brother-practitioners, who had been appointed to assist him in examining Cocoleu's mental condition. "And that is what brings me here," he cried, as he entered M. de Chandore's *salon*; "for this examination, if not looked after, may deprive M. de Boiscoran of his best and surest chance of escape."

After what Denise had told them, neither M. de Chandore nor M. Folgat attached much importance to the state of Cocoleu's mind: still this word "escape" attracted their attention. There is nothing unimportant in a criminal trial. "Is there anything new?" asked the advocate.

The doctor first closed the door, and then, placing his cane and broad-brimmed hat upon the table, he replied:—"No, there is nothing new. They still insist upon ruining M. de Boiscoran, and shrink from nothing in order to do so."

"They! who are they?" asked M. de Chandore.

The doctor shrugged his shoulders contemptuously. "Are you really still in doubt, sir?" he replied. "And yet the facts speak clearly enough. In this department, as well as others, there are, I am sorry to say, several physicians who are by no means an honour to their profession, who are, to tell the truth, perfect asses. There is one of these donkeys, who, in length of ears and thickness of hide, surpasses all the others. Well, he is the very one chosen to act as my colleague. Briefly, my learned brother is fully persuaded that his duty as a physician employed by a court of justice is to say 'Amen' to all the inventions of the prosecution. 'Cocoleu is an idiot,' says M. Galpin. 'He is an idiot, or ought to be one,' re-echoes my learned brother. 'If he spoke on the night of the crime, it was by an inspiration from on high,' adds the magistrate. 'Evidently,' says my *confrere*, 'there was an inspiration from on high.' For this is the conclusion at which my learned brother arrives in his report: 'Cocoleu is an idiot provi-

dentially inspired with a flash of reason.' He does not say it in these words; but it amounts to the same thing."

Dr. Seignebos paused, quite out of breath, and, taking off his spectacles, proceeded to wipe them with furious gestures.

"But what do you think, doctor?" asked M. Folgat.

"My opinion, which I have fully developed in my report, is, that Cocoleu is not idiotic at all."

M. de Chandore started: the proposition seemed to him monstrous. He knew Cocoleu very well, and had often seen him wandering through the streets of Sauveterre during the eighteen months which the poor creature had spent under the doctor's treatment. "What! Cocoleu not idiotic?" exclaimed the baron.

"No!" peremptorily replied the doctor; "and you have only to look at him to be convinced. Has he a large flat face, a disproportioned mouth, a yellow, tanned complexion, thick lips, defective teeth, and squinting eyes? Does his deformed head sway from side to side, as too heavy to be supported by his neck? Is his body deformed, and his spine crooked? Is his stomach enlarged and pendent, do his hands drop upon his thighs, are his legs awkward, and the joints unusually large? These are the symptoms of idiocy, gentlemen, and they are not to be found in Cocoleu. I, for my part, believe him to be a scamp, with an iron constitution, very clever with his hands, climbing trees like a monkey, and leaping ditches ten feet wide. To be sure, I don't pretend that his intellect is normal; but I maintain that he is one of those imbeciles who have certain faculties very fully developed, while others, more essential are missing."

While M. Folgat listened with the most intense interest, M. de Chandore, growing impatient, exclaimed:—"The difference between an idiot and an imbecile—"

"Is immense," cried the doctor. And with overwhelming volubility, he continued,—*"The imbecile preserves some fragments of intelligence. He can speak, make his wants known, express his feelings. He associates ideas, compares impressions, remembers things, and acquires experience. He is capable of cunning and dissimulation. He hates and likes and fears. If he is not always sociable, he is susceptible of being influenced by others. You can easily obtain perfect control over him.*

His inconsistency is remarkable ; and still he shows, at times, invincible obstinacy. Finally, imbeciles are, on account of this semi-lucidity, often very dangerous. You find among them almost all those monomaniacs whom society is compelled to shut up in asylums, because they cannot master their instincts."

"Very well said," observed M. Folgat, who found in these remarks some elements of a plea,—“very well said."

The doctor bowed. "Such a creature is Cocoleu. Does it follow that I hold him responsible for his actions ? By no means ! But it follows that I look upon him as a false witness, brought forth to ruin an honest man."

It was evident that such views did not please M. de Chandore. "Formerly," he said, "you did not think so."

"No, I even said the contrary," replied Dr. Seignebos. "I had not studied Cocoleu sufficiently, and I was taken in by him : I confess it openly. But this avowal of mine is an evidence of the cunning and astute obstinacy displayed by these wretched creatures, and of their capacity to carry out a design. After a year's experience, I sent Cocoleu away, declaring, and certainly believing, that he was incurable. The fact is, he did not want to be cured. The country people, who observe carefully and shrewdly, were not taken in : they will tell you, almost to a man, that Cocoleu is more artful than foolish. That is the truth. He has found out, that, by exaggerating his imbecility, he could live without work ; and he has acted on the discovery. When the Count de Claudieuse took pity on him, he was sufficiently clever to show just enough intelligence to be supported without having to do any work."

"In a word," said M. de Chandore incredulously, "Cocoleu is a great actor."

"Great enough to have deceived me," replied the doctor : "yes, sir." Then turning to M. Folgat, he added,—“All this I have told my learned brother, before taking him to the hospital. There we found Cocoleu more obstinately silent than ever. All our efforts to obtain a word from him were fruitless, although it was evident to me that he understood very well. I proposed to resort to quite legitimate means, which are employed to discover feigned defects and diseases ; but my learned brother refused, and was encouraged in his resistance by M. Galpin-

Daveline. On what grounds I don't know. When I asked that the Countess de Claudieuse should be sent for, as she has a talent for making him talk, M. Galpin would not permit it—and there we are.”

It happens almost daily, that two physicians employed as experts differ in their opinions. Law courts would have a terrible task before them if they had to make the rival practitioners agree. Accordingly they are content to appoint a third expert, whose opinion is decisive. This was necessary to be done in Cocoleu's case. Now Dr. Seignebos, already convinced that his brother expert was a fool, was moreover afraid that by M. Galpin-Daveline's influence, a second fool would be appointed to decide the question finally. Accordingly he wished the two families interested in the defence to exert all their influence so as to obtain the appointment of a committee of physicians chosen out of the district, and if possible in Paris, with the object of having Cocoleu carefully examined, and his condition reported on by men of incontestable authority. A long discussion ensued on the subject between the doctor, the advocate and the Baron de Chandore,—M. Folgat displaying determined opposition to the doctor's suggestion—remarking that if Cocoleu was found to be sane—the discovery might prove more injurious than beneficial to M. de Boiscoran's cause. “Cocoleu's idiocy,” he said, “is, perhaps the most serious difficulty in the way of the prosecution, and the most powerful argument for the defence. What can M. Galpin say, if M. de Boiscoran charges him with basing a capital charge upon the incoherent words of a creature void of intelligence, and, consequently, irresponsible. If, on the contrary, it is established that Cocoleu really knows what he says, all is changed. The prosecution is supported by an opinion of the faculty in saying to M. de Boiscoran, ‘You need not deny any longer. You have been seen; here is a reliable witness.’”

Dr Seignebos seemed struck by these arguments, but he nevertheless returned to the charge, maintaining that whatever might be the result it was his duty to see the truth established. Moreover, in point of fact, the question affected him personally. He believed that Cocoleu had deceived him while under his treatment; and assuredly the idiot had been the cause of innumerable petty witticisms

launched against the doctor,—witticisms which had made him suffer cruelly, offending him not so much as a man as in his professional capacity. Now, if he could unmask Cocoleu, he would have his revenge, and be able to cast upon his enemies some of the ridicule with which they had overwhelmed him. "I have made up my mind," he said, at last, "and, whatever you may resolve, I mean to go to work at once, and try to obtain the appointment of a commission."

"Before doing anything," said M. Folgat, "it might be prudent to consult M. Magloire."

"I do not want to consult Magloire when duty tells me what course I should adopt."

"You will grant us twenty-four hours, I hope."

Dr. Seigneboš frowned, "Not an hour," he replied; "I am going from here to the office of the public prosecutor."

Thereupon, taking up his hat and cane, he bowed and walked out of the room, without stopping even to answer M. de Chandore, who asked him how the Count de Claudieuse was getting on. It was generally rumoured that the chief victim of the Valpinson catastrophe was in a most precarious condition.

"Hang the old original!" cried M. de Chandore as the doctor walked through the hall. Then, turning to M. Folgat, he added,—"I must, however, confess that you received the news which he brought rather coldly."

"The very fact of the news being so very grave," replied the advocate, "made me wish for time to consider. If Cocoleu pretends to be imbecile, or, at least, exaggerates his incapacity, then we have a confirmation of what M. de Boiscoran told Mademoiselle Denise last night. It would be the proof of an odious conspiracy, of a long premeditated vengeance. Here is the turning-point of the affair evidently."

"What!" cried M. de Chandore, "you think so, and yet you refused to support Dr. Seigneboš, who is certainly an honest man?"

The young lawyer shook his head. "I wanted to have twenty-four hours' delay, because we must absolutely consult M. de Boiscoran. Could I tell the doctor so? Had I a right to take him into the secret?"

"You are right," murmured M. de Chandore, "you are right."

Accordingly, when Denise came downstairs again in the afternoon, looking still very pale, but evidently armed with new courage, M. Folgat dictated to her certain questions to ask the prisoner. She hastened to right them in cipher; and about four o'clock the letter was sent to Mechinot, the clerk. The next evening the answer came. "Dr Seignebos is no doubt right, my dear friends," wrote Jacques. "I have good reasons to be sure that Cocoleu's imbecility is partly assumed, and that his evidence has been prompted by others. Still I must beg you will take up no steps that would lead to another medical investigation. The slightest imprudence may ruin me. For heaven's sake wait till the end of the preliminary investigation, which is now near at hand, from what Galpin tells me."

This letter was read in the family circle, and the poor mother uttered a cry of despair as she heard her son's words of resignation. "Are we going to obey him," she cried, "when we all know that he is ruining himself by his obstinacy?"

"Jacques alone can judge his situation," replied Denise rising from her seat, and he alone, therefore, has the right to command. Our duty is to obey. I appeal to M. Folgat."

The young advocate nodded his head. "Everything has been done that could be done," he said. "Now we can only wait."

XII.

THE famous fire at Valpinson had been a godsend to the good people of Sauveterre. Ever since its occurrence they had had an inexhaustible topic of discussion, ever new and ever rich in unexpected conjectures,—the Bois-coran case, which promised to become a *cause celebre*. Thus it happened that whenever M. Galpin-Daveline walked from the court-house to the prison, or came stiffly striding up the Rue Nationale, twenty good house-wives peeped from behind their curtains trying to read in his face some of the secrets of the investigation. They dis-

covered, however, nothing but traces of intense anxiety, and a pallor which became daily more marked.

In point of fact this Boiscoran case was a thorn in the ambitious magistrate's side—more than a thorn indeed, a festering wound fraught with incessant and intolerable irritation. Every day he saw more clearly that he was in a false position; although public opinion was strongly against M. de Boiscoran, it was not, on that account, very favourable to M. Galpin-Daveline. Everybody believed Jacques guilty, and wanted him to be punished with all the rigour of the law; but, on the other hand, people were astonished that M. Galpin-Daveline should choose to act as examining magistrate in such a case. There was a touch of treachery in this proceeding against a former friend, in searching for evidence against him, in driving him into court, that is to say, towards the galleys or the scaffold; and the public conscience was revolted at such conduct. The very way in which people returned the magistrate's greeting, or avoided him altogether, made him aware of the feelings entertained towards him. This only increased his wrath against Jacques, and, with it, his trouble. He had been congratulated, it is true, by the attorney-general; but there is no certainty in a trial, as long as the accused refuses to confess. The charges against Jacques, to be sure, seemed so overwhelming, that his being sent before the court was beyond question. But once in court what would the jury say?

"And in fine," the public prosecutor remarked, "you have not a single eye-witness. And from time immemorial an eye-witness has been looked upon as worth a hundred hearsays."

"I have Cocoleu," said M. Galpin-Daveline impatiently.

"Have the doctors decided that he is not an idiot?"

"No; Dr Seignebos alone maintains that doctrine."

"Well, at least Cocoleu is willing to repeat his evidence?"

"No."

"Why, then, you have virtually no witness!"

Yes such was the case, M. Galpin-Daveline understood it but too well, and hence his anxiety. The more he studied *his* accused, the more he found him to be a threatening enigma ominous of evil. "Can he have an *alibi*?" he thought. "Or does he hold in reserve one of those un-

foreseen revelations, which at the last moment destroy the whole edifice of the prosecution, and cover the prosecution itself with ridicule?" Whenever these thoughts occurred to him, big drops of perspiration would run down his temples, and he would treat his poor clerk Mechinot like a dog. Nor was this all. Many a report reached him from the Chandore family, and although he was far from imagining the truth, being quite ignorant of Denise's correspondence with Jacques and her visit to the prison, still he knew that she was surrounded by devoted and intelligent men, including M. de Chandore, M. Seneschal, Dr. Seignebois, M. Magloire, and, finally, the advocate whom the Marchioness de Boiscoran had brought down with her from Paris, M. Folgat. And heaven alone knew what they would not try to rescue the guilty man from the hands of justice! With this thought in his mind, M. Galpin devoted all his energies to the case, and each of the points upon which the prosecution relied became for him the subject of special study. In less than a fortnight he examined sixty-seven witnesses. He summoned the fourth part of the population of Brechy. He would have summoned the whole country, if he had dared. But all his efforts were fruitless. After weeks of laborious investigations, the inquiry was still at the same point, the mystery was still impenetrable. The prisoner had not refuted any of the charges made against him; but, on the other hand, the magistrate had not obtained a single additional piece of evidence.

Matters could not remain in this condition for ever. One warm afternoon in July, as M. Galpin-Daveline walked along the Rue Nationale, the housewives who observed him from behind their window-curtains, thought that he looked even more anxious than usual. They were right. After a long conference with the public prosecutor and the presiding judge, the investigating magistrate had taken a serious determination. Proceeding to the prison, he went to Jacques's cell and announced that his "painful duty" was drawing to a close. The inquiry was finished, and on the morrow the papers, with a list of the objects to be used as evidence, would be sent to the attorney-general, to be submitted to the court.

Jacques de Boiscoran did not move. "Well, what then?" he simply asked.

"Have you nothing to add, sir?" asked M. Galpin-Daveline in his turn.

"Nothing, except that I am innocent."

The magistrate found it difficult to repress his impatience. "Then, prove it," he exclaimed. "Refute the charges which have been brought against you, which overwhelm you, which induce me, the court, and everybody else, to consider you guilty. Speak, and explain your conduct."

Jacques kept obstinately silent.

"Your resolution is fixed," said the magistrate once more, "you refuse to say anything?"

"I am innocent."

M. Galpin saw clearly that it was useless to insist any further. "From this moment," he said, "you are no longer in solitary confinement. You can receive the visits of your family in the prison parlour. The advocate you choose will be admitted to your cell to consult with you."

"At last!" exclaimed Jacques with explosive delight, "Am I at liberty to write to M. de Chandore?"

"Yes," replied M. Galpin-Daveline, "and, if you choose to write at once, my clerk will carry your letter to its destination this evening."

Jacques de Boiscoran immediately availed himself of this permission; and a couple of minutes later he handed the following note to Mechinet:—

"I shall expect M. Magloire to-morrow morning at nine.
"J."

Ever since Jacques's friends had come to the conclusion that a false step might have the most fatal consequences, they had carefully abstained from taking any action. Besides, what would have been the use of any efforts they might make? Dr. Seignebo's request, though unsupported, had been at least partially granted; and the court had summoned a physician from Paris, a great authority on insanity, to examine Cocoleu's mental condition. It was on a Saturday that Dr. Seignebo came triumphantly to announce the good news; but on the following Tuesday he had to report absolute discomfiture. The Paris physician had proved as great a fool as his Sauveterre confrere—siding with the authorities and proclaiming Cocoleu to be an absolute idiot.

Dr. Seignebo was in a furious passion when he called

on the Baron de Chandore to acquaint Jacques's friends with this result. Still he added that he did not yet despair proving that Cocoleu was a miserable impostor, exclaiming, moreover, in stentorian tones: "And M. de Boiscoran may count on me. I have my reasons for saying so. I have formed very singular suspicions, very singular indeed."

M. Folgat, Denise, and the marchioness urged him to explain; but he declared that the moment had not yet arrived for him to do so. He left the house in his usual abrupt fashion, vowing that he was over-worked, and that he must hurry off to see the Count de Claudieuse who was getting worse and worse.

"What can the old fellow suspect?" asked Grandpapa Chandore, as the hall door closed behind the doctor. M. Folgat might have replied that the medical man's suspicions were no doubt similar to his own, only perhaps better founded and more fully developed. Still it was not for him to say so. Was not all inquiry prohibited, had they not been told that a single imprudent word might ruin everything? Why then excite new hopes when they must needs wait patiently till M. Galpin-Daveline thought fit to put an end to this melancholy suspense.

Some days had elapsed without any news from Jacques, when, one afternoon, Mechinet the clerk boldly presented himself at M. de Chandore's house. This fact alone intimated that there was something new, and when M. Galpin's subordinate handed Jacques's brief note to Denise, who met him in the hall, she, reading it by a single glance, ran at once to acquaint her grandfather and M. Folgat with the good news that the prisoner was no longer in solitary confinement. At the same time she instructed a servant to go in search of M. Magloire. In less than an hour, the eminent advocate of Sauveterre arrived. Jacques's letter was handed to him, and when he had perused it, he remarked, with some embarrassment, "I have promised M. de Boiscoran my assistance, and he shall certainly have it. I shall be at the prison to-morrow morning as soon as the doors open, and I will tell you the result of our interview."

He would say nothing more. It was very evident that he did not believe in the innocence of his client; and, as

soon as he had left, M. de Chandore exclaimed, "Jacques is mad to intrust his defence to a man who doubts him."

"M. Magloire is an honourable man," said Denise, "and, if he thought he might compromise Jacques, he would not undertake the task."

Yes, indeed, M. Magloire was an honourable man, and quite accessible to tender sentiments; for he felt very reluctant to go and see the prisoner, who had been his friend, and whom he could not help loving still, although he really believed that he was justly charged. He could not sleep for it that night; and all noticed his anxious air as he walked through the town next morning on his way to the jail. Slowly, and with his heart beating quick, the famous advocate went up the narrow stairs. He crossed the long passage; Blangin opened a door; and the next moment M. Magloire was in Jacques de Boiscoran's cell.

"At last you are here," exclaimed the unhappy young man, throwing himself into the advocate's arms. "At last, I see an honest face, and hold a trusty hand. Ah! I have suffered cruelly, so cruelly, that I am surprised my mind has not given way. But now you are here by my side, I am safe."

The lawyer could not speak. He was terrified by the havoc which grief had caused in his friend's noble and intelligent face. He was shocked at the distortion of his features, the unnatural brilliancy of his eyes, and the convulsive smile on his lips. "Poor man!" he murmured at last.

Jacques misunderstood him; he stepped back, as white as the walls of his cell. "You do not think me guilty?" he exclaimed; and as he spoke, an inexpressibly sad expression came into his eyes. "To be sure," he continued with a convulsive laugh, "the charges must be overwhelming indeed, if they have convinced my best friends. Alas! why did I refuse to speak that first day? My honour!—what a phantom! And still, victimised as I am by an infamous conspiracy, I should still refuse to speak, if my life alone were at stake. But my honour is at stake, Denise's honour, the honour of the Boiscorans. I shall speak. You, M. Magloire, shall know the truth: you shall see my innocence in a word."

And, seizing the advocate's hand, he pressed it almost

painfully, adding in a hoarse voice,—“One word will explain the whole thing to you ; I was the lover of the Countess de Claudieuse !”

XIII.

IF he had been less distressed, Jacques de Boiscoran would have seen how wisely he had acted in choosing the great advocate of Sauveterre for his defender. A stranger, M. Folgat for instance, would have heard him silently, and would have seen in this revelation nothing but a fact submitted to his personal appreciation. But M. Magloire, on the contrary, was bound to express the feelings of the whole district ; and when the advocate heard Jacques declare that the Countess de Claudieuse had been his mistress, he gave him an indignant glance and exclaimed,—“That is impossible.”

Jacques was certainly not surprised. He had been the first to say that people would refuse to believe him when he did speak ; and this conviction had largely influenced him in keeping silent so long. “It is improbable, I know,” he said ; “and still it is so.”

“Give me proofs !” said M. Magloire.

“I have no proofs.”

The great lawyer’s melancholy and sympathising expression changed instantly. He glanced sternly at the prisoner ; and the gleam in his eyes spoke of amazement and indignation. “There are things,” he said, “which it is rash to affirm when one is not able to support them with proof. Consider—”

“My situation forces me to tell everything.”

“Why, then, did you wait so long ?”

“I hoped I should be spared such a fearful extremity.”

“By whom ?”

“By the countess.”

M. Magloire’s expression became darker and darker. “I am not often accused of partiality,” he said. “The Count de Claudieuse is, perhaps, the only enemy I have in the province, but he is a fierce bitter enemy. To keep me out of the Chamber, and to prevent my obtaining many votes, he stooped to acts unworthy of a gentleman. I do not like him. But in justice I must say that I look upon

the countess as the loftiest, purest, the noblest type of a woman, a wife, and a mother."

A bitter smile played on Jacques's lips. "And still I was her lover," he said.

"When? How? The countess lived at Valpinson, and you in Paris."

"Yes; but every year the countess came and spent the month of September in Paris; and I came occasionally to Boiscoran."

"It is very singular that such an intrigue should never have been suspected even."

"We managed to take our precautions."

"And no one ever suspected anything?"

"No one."

But Jacques was at last becoming impatient at the attitude which M. Magloire had assumed. He forgot that he himself had foreseen all the suspicions to which he was now exposed. "Why do you ask all these questions?" he said. "You do not believe me. Well, be it so! Let me at least try to convince you. Will you listen to me?"

M. Magloire drew forward a chair, and sitting down, not in the usual fashion, but astride it, and resting his arms on the back, he said—"I am listening."

Jacques de Boiscoran, hitherto almost livid, now grew crimson with anger. His eyes flashed fire! To be treated thus indeed! Never had M. Galpin's haughtiness offended him so acutely, as M. Magloire's apparently disdainful condescension. It occurred to him to request the advocate to leave his room. But what then? He was condemned to drain the bitter cup to the dregs: for he must save himself; he must extricate himself from this abyss. "You are cruel, Magloire," he said, in a voice of ill-suppressed indignation, "and you make me feel all the horrors of my situation to the full. Ah, do not apologise! It does not matter. Let me speak."

Jacques took a few hasty steps up and down his cell, passing his hand repeatedly over his brow, as if to rack his memory. Then, in a calmer tone of voice, he began—"It was in the first days of the month of August, in 1866, and at Boiscoran, where I was on a visit to my uncle, that I saw the Countess de Claudieuse for the first time. The Count de Claudieuse and my uncle were, at that time, on very bad terms with each other, owing to that unlucky

little stream which crosses our estates ; and a common friend, M. de Besson, had undertaken to reconcile them at a dinner to which both were invited. My uncle had taken me with him. The countess had come with her husband. I was just twenty years old ; she was twenty-six. It was a case of love at first sight. It seemed to me that I had never in my life met a woman so perfectly beautiful and graceful ; that I had never seen so charming a face, such beautiful eyes, and such a sweet smile. She did not seem to notice me. I did not speak to her ; and still I felt a kind of presentiment that this woman would play a great, a fatal part in my life. This impression was so strong, that, as we left the house, I could not help mentioning it to my uncle. He only laughed, and said that I was a fool, and that, if my existence should ever be troubled by a woman, it would certainly not be by the Countess de Claudieuse. He was apparently right. It was hard to imagine that anything should ever again bring me in contact with the countess. M. de Besson's attempt at reconciliation had utterly failed ; the countess continued to live at Valpinson ; and I went back to Paris. Still I was unable to shake off the impression ; and the memory of the dinner at M. de Besson's house was still in my mind, when, a month later, at the *soiree* given by M. de Chalusse, I thought I recognised the Countess de Claudieuse. It was she. I bowed, and, seeing that she recognised me, I went up to her, and she allowed me to sit down beside her. She told me then that she had come to Paris for a month ; as she did every year, and that she was staying with her father, the Marquis de Tassar de Bruc. She had come to this *soiree* much against her inclination, as she disliked going out. She did not dance ; and thus I remained talking with her till the moment she left. I was madly in love when we parted ; and still I made no effort to see her again. It was mere chance once more which brought us together."

Jacques paused for a moment ; then continuing, "One day," said he, "I had business at Melun, and reaching the station rather late, I had but just time to jump into the nearest carriage. The countess was in that identical compartment. She told me—and that is all I ever recollected of the whole conversation—that she was on her way to Fontainebleau to see a friend, with whom she spent

every Tuesday and Saturday. Usually she took the nine o'clock train. This was on a Tuesday; and during the next three days a great struggle went on in my heart. I was desperately in love with the countess, and still I was afraid of her. But my evil star conquered; and the next Saturday, at nine o'clock, I was at the station again. The countess has since confessed to me that she expected me. When she saw me, she made a sign; and, opening the door, I managed to secure a place by her side."

M. Magloire had for some minutes given signs of great impatience. "This is too improbable!" he now exclaimed.

At first Jacques de Boiscoran made no reply. It was no easy task for a man, tried as he had been of late, to stir up the ashes of the past. He was amazed at finding on his lips a secret which he had so long buried in his innermost heart. Besides, he had loved, loved in good earnest; and his love had been returned. And there are certain sensations which come to us only once in life, and which can never again be effaced. He was moved to tears. But as the eminent advocate of Sauveterre repeated his words, even adding that Jacques's story was not credible, the prisoner gently answered: "I do not ask you to believe me, I only ask you to hear me." Then overcoming with all his energy the torpor which was mastering him, he continued, "This trip to Fontainebleau decided our fate. Other trips followed. The countess spent her days with her friend, and I passed the long hours in roaming through the woods. But in the evening we met again at the station. We took a *coupe*, which I had engaged beforehand, and I accompanied her in a carriage to her father's house. Finally, one evening, she left her friend's house at the usual hour; but she did not return to her father's house till the day after."

"Jacques!" broke in M. Magloire, shocked, as if he had heard a curse,—"Jacques!"

M. de Boiscoran remained unmoved. "I know you must think it strange," he replied. "You fancy there is no excuse for the man who betrays a woman who has surrendered herself to him. Wait, before you judge me." And he continued in a firmer tone: "At that time I thought I was the happiest man on earth; and my heart was full of the most absurd vanity at the thought that she

was mine, this beautiful woman, whose purity was high above all calumny. I had tied around my neck one of those fatal ropes which death alone can sever, and, fool that I was, I considered myself happy. Perhaps she really loved me at that time. At least she did not hesitate, and, overcome by the only real great passion of her life, she told me all that was in her innermost heart. At that time she had not yet thought of making me her slave. She told me the secret of her marriage, which had at one time created such a sensation. After her father, the Marquis de Tassar de Bruc, resigned, he soon felt his inactivity weigh upon him, and at the same time grew impatient at the narrowness of his means. He ventured upon hazardous speculations. He lost everything he had; and even his honour was at stake. In his despair he was thinking of suicide, when chance brought to his house a former comrade, the Count de Claudieuse. In a moment of confidence, the marquis confessed, everything; and the other promised to save him from disgrace. It was noble and grand to do so. It must have cost an immense sum. And the friends of our youth who are capable of rendering us such services are rare indeed now-a-days. Unfortunately, the Count de Claudieuse did not display entire disinterestedness. He saw Genevieve de Tassar. He was struck with her beauty; and overcome by a sudden passion—forgetting that she was twenty, while he was nearly fifty—he made his friend aware that he was willing to render him all the services in his power, but that he desired to obtain Genevieve's hand in return. That very evening the ruined nobleman entered his daughter's room, and, with tears in his eyes, explained to her his terrible situation. She did not hesitate a moment. 'Above all,' she said to her father, 'let us save our honour, which even your death would not restore. The Count de Claudieuse is cruel to forget that he is thirty years older than I am. From this moment I hate and despise him, but tell him I am willing to be his wife.' And when her father, overcome with grief, told her that the count would never accept her hand in this form, she replied, 'Oh, do not trouble yourself about that! Your friend will have no right to complain. But I know what I am worth; and you must remember hereafter, that, whatever service he may render you, you owe him nothing.'

"Less than a fortnight after this scene," continued Jacques; "Genevieve had allowed the count to perceive that she was not insensible to his flattery, and a month later she became his wife. The count, on his side, had acted with considerable tact; so that no one suspected the Marquis de Tassar's cruel position. M. de Claudieuse had placed two hundred thousand francs in his hands to settle his most pressing debts. In his marriage-contract he acknowledged having received with his wife a dower of the same amount; and finally, he bound himself to pay his father-in-law an annual income of ten thousand francs. This arrangement absorbed more than half of all M. de Claudieuse possessed."

M. Magloire no longer thought of protesting. Sitting stiffly on his chair, with eyes wide open, like a man who asks himself whether he is asleep or awake, he murmured,—"This is incomprehensible! Unheard of!"

Jacques was becoming gradually excited. "At all events," he continued, "it is what the countess told me in her first hours of enthusiasm. But she told it to me calmly, coldly, like a thing that was perfectly natural. 'Certainly,' she said, 'the Count de Claudieuse has never had to regret the bargain he made. If he has been generous, I have been faithful. My father owes his life to him; but I have given him years of happiness to which he was not entitled. If he has received no love, he has had all the appearance of it, and an appearance far more pleasant than the reality.' When I could not conceal my astonishment, she added, laughing heartily,—'Only I brought to the bargain a mental reservation. I reserved to myself the right to claim my share of earthly happiness whenever it came within my reach. That share is yours, Jacques; and do not fancy that I am troubled by remorse. As long as my husband thinks he is happy, I am within the terms of the contract.' That was how she spoke at the time, Magloire; and a man of more experience would have been frightened. But I was a child: I loved her with all my heart. I admired her genius; I was overcome by her sophisms. However, a letter from the Count de Claudieuse aroused us from our dreams. The countess had committed the only and the last imprudence of her life; she had remained three weeks longer in Paris than was agreed upon; and her impatient husband threatened

to come for her. 'I must go back to Valpinson,' she said; 'for there is nothing I would not do to keep up the reputation I have managed to make for myself. My life, your life; my daughter's life—I would give them all, without hesitation, to protect my reputation. I cannot remain longer than a month,' she added, 'without seeing you. A month from to-day, that is to say, on the 12th November, at three o'clock precisely; you must be in the forest of Rochepommier, at the Carrefour des Hommes Rouges: I will be there.' And then she left Paris. I was in such a state of delirium, that I scarcely felt the pain of parting. The thought of being loved by such a woman filled me with extreme pride; and, no doubt, saved me from many an excess. Ambition was rising within me whenever I thought of her. I wanted to work, to distinguish myself, to become eminent in some way. 'I want her to be proud of me,' I said to myself, ashamed of being nothing at my age, but a rich father's son."

Ten times, at least, M. Magloire had risen from his chair, and moved his lips, as if about to make some objection. But he had pledged himself, in his own mind, not to interrupt Jacques, and he did his best to keep his pledge.

"In the mean time," Jacques went on; "the day fixed by the countess was drawing near. I went down to Bois coran; and on the appointed day, I was in the forest near the Carrefour. I was somewhat behind time, and I was extremely sorry for it; but I did not know the forest very well, and the place chosen by the countess for our rendezvous is in its densest part. The weather was unusually severe for the season. The night before, a heavy snow had fallen: the paths were all white; and a sharp wind blew the flakes from the heavily-loaded branches. From afar off, I distinguished the countess, as she was walking up and down in a kind of feverish excitement, confining herself to a narrow space, where the ground was dry, and where she was sheltered from the wind by enormous masses of rock. In three minutes I was by her side. But she did not draw her hand from her muff to offer it to me; and, without giving me time to apologise for the delay, she said in a dry tone;—'When did you reach Bois coran?' 'Last night.' 'How childish you are!' she exclaimed, stamping her foot. 'Last night. And on what pretext?' 'I need

no pretext to visit my uncle.' 'And was he not surprised to see you drop from the clouds at this time of the year?' 'Why, yes, a little,' I answered foolishly, incapable as I was of concealing the truth. Her dissatisfaction increased visibly. 'And how did you get here?' she commenced again. 'Did you know this Carrefour?' 'No, I inquired about it.' 'Of whom?' 'Of one of my uncle's servants; but his information was so imperfect, that I lost my way.' She looked at me with such a bitter ironical smile, that I stopped short. 'And you think all that very simple,' she said. 'Do you really imagine people will think it natural that you should fall like a bombshell upon Boiscoran, and immediately set out for the Carrefour des Hommes Rouges in the forest? Who knows but you have been followed? Who knows but that behind one of these trees there may be eyes watching us even now?' Then as she looked around with all the signs of genuine fear, I answered, 'And what are you afraid of? Am I not here?'"

Jacques paused once more; his rapid recital had taken away his breath, "I think," he eventually resumed, "I think I can even now see the look in her eyes as she said,—'I fear nothing in the world—do you hear me? nothing in the world, except being suspected; for I must not be compromised. I like to do as I do; I like to have a lover. But I do not want it to be known; because, if it became known, there would be mischief. Between my reputation and my life I have no choice. If I were to be surprised here by any one, I would rather it should be by my husband than a stranger. I have no love for the count, and I shall never forgive him for having married me; but he has saved my father's honour, and I owe it to him to keep his honour unimpaired in the eyes of the world. He is my husband, besides, and the father of my children: I bear his name, and it must be respected. I should die with grief and shame and rage, if I had to give my arm to a man at whom people might look and smile. Still I do not love the count, Jacques, I love you. But remember, that, between him and you, I should not hesitate a moment, and that I should sacrifice your life and your honour, with a smile on my lips—even though my heart should break—if I could, by so doing, spare him the shadow of a suspicion.' I was about to reply: but she added,—'No more!' Every minute we stay here increases the danger. What pretext will

you plead for your sudden appearance at Boiscoran?’ ‘I do not now,’ I replied. ‘You must borrow some money from your uncle,’ she rejoined, ‘a considerable sum, to pay your debts. He will be angry, perhaps; but that will explain your sudden fancy for travelling in the month of November. Good-bye, good-bye!’ ‘What!’ I cried, all amazed. ‘You will not let me see you again, at least from afar?’ ‘During this visit it would be the height of imprudence. But, stop! remain at Boiscoran till Sunday. Your uncle never stays away from high mass; go with him to church. But be careful, control yourself. A single imprudence, one blunder, and I should despise you. Now we must part. You will find in Paris a letter from me.’”

Again did Jacques pause, trying to read in M. Magloire’s face what impression his recital had produced so far. But the famous lawyer remained impassive. The prisoner sighed, and then once more continued,—‘I have entered into all these details, Magloire, because I want you to know what kind of a woman the countess is, so that you may understand her conduct. You see that she did not treat me like a traitor: she had given me fair warning, and shown me the abyss into which I was going to fall. Alas! so far from being terrified, these dark sides of her character only attracted me the more. I admired her imperious air, her courage, and her prudence, even her total lack of principle, which contrasted so strangely with her fear of public opinion. I said to myself with foolish pride,—‘She certainly is a superior woman!’ She must have been pleased with my obedience at church; for I managed to check even a slight trembling which seized me when, seeing her pass, I bowed, being so close to her that my hand touched her dress. I obeyed her in other ways also. I asked my uncle for six thousand francs, and he gave them to me, laughing; for he was the most generous man on earth: but at the same time he remarked,—‘I thought you had not come to Boiscoran merely for the purpose of exploring the forest of Rochepommier.’ This trifling circumstance increased my admiration for the Countess de Claudieuse. How well she had foreseen my uncle’s astonishment, when I had not even dreamed of it! ‘She has a genius for prudence,’ I thought. Yes, indeed she had a genius for it, and a genius for calculation also, as I soon discovered. When I reached Paris, I found a letter from her waiting for me but it was

nothing more than a repetition of all she had told me at our meeting. This letter was followed by several others, which she begged me to keep for her sake, and which all had a number in the upper corner. The first time I saw her again, I asked her,—"What do these numbers mean?"

"My dear Jacques," she replied, "a woman ought always to know how many letters she has written to her lover. Up till now you must have had nine." This occurred in May, 1867; at Rochefort, where she had gone to be present at the launching of a frigate, and where I had followed her, at her suggestion, with a view of our spending a few hours in each other's company. Like a fool, I laughed at the idea of this epistolary responsibility, and then thought no more about it. I was at that time too busy in other ways. She reminded me of the fact that time was passing, and that the month of September, her month of freedom, was drawing near: Should we be compelled again, like the year before, to resort to these perilous trips to Fontainebleau? Why not get a house in some remote quarter of Paris? Each of her wishes was an order for me. My uncle's liberality knew no end. I bought a house."

At last, for the first time in Jacques's recital, there appeared a circumstance which might furnish tangible evidence. M. Magloire started, and asked eagerly,—“Ah, you bought a house?”

“Yes, a nice house with a large garden in the Rue des Vignes at Passy.”

“And you own it still?”

“Yes.”

“Of course you have the title deeds?” Jacques looked in despair. “Here, again, fate is against me. There is quite a tale connected with that house.”

The Sauveterre lawyer's look grew dark again, much quicker than it had brightened up just before. “Ah?” he said,—“a tale, ah!”

“I was scarcely of age,” resumed Jacques, “when I wished to purchase this house. I dreaded difficulties. I was afraid my father might hear of it; in fine, I wanted to be as prudent as the countess was. I therefore asked one of my English friends, Sir Francis Burnett, to purchase it in his name. He agreed, and handed me, with

the necessary bills of sale, a paper in which he acknowledged my right as proprietor."

"But then—"

"Oh! wait a moment. I did not take these papers to my rooms in my father's house. I put them into a drawer at Passy. When the war broke out, I forgot them. I had left Paris before the German siege began, as you know, and during the two sieges my house was successively occupied by the National Guards, the soldiers of the Commune, and the regular troops. When I went back there, I found the four walls pierced with holes; and, moreover, all the furniture had disappeared, and with it the papers."

"And Sir Francis Burnett?"

"He left France directly war broke out; and I don't know what has become of him. Two friends of his in England, to whom I wrote, replied,—the one, that he was probably in Australia; the other that he was dead."

"And you have taken no other steps to secure your rights to a piece of property which legally belongs to you?"

"No, not till now."

"You mean to say virtually that there is in Paris a house which has no owner, is forgotten by everybody, and unknown even to the tax-gatherer?"

"I beg your pardon! The taxes have always been regularly paid; and the whole neighbourhood knows that I am the owner. But the individuality is not the same. I have unceremoniously assumed the identity of my friend. In the eyes of the neighbours, the shopkeepers, the workmen and contractors whom I employed, and to the servants and the gardener, I am Sir Francis Burnett. Ask them about Jacques de Boiscoran, and they will reply, 'Don't know him.' Ask them about Sir Francis Burnett, and they will answer, 'Oh, very well!' and they will give you my portrait."

M. Magloire shook his head as if he were not fully convinced. "Then," he asked again, "you declare that the Countess de Claudieuse has been at this house?"

"More than fifty times in three years."

"If that is so, she must be known there."

"But Paris is not like Sauveterre, my dear friend; and people are not solely occupied with their neighbours'

doings. The Rue des Vignes is quite a deserted street, and the countess took the greatest precautions in coming and going."

"Well, granted, as far as the outside world is concerned. But within? You must have had somebody to stay in the house and keep it in order when you are away and to wait upon you when you were there?"

"I had an English maid-servant."

"Well, this girl must know the countess?"

"She never caught a glimpse of her even, for when the countess was coming, or when she was going away, or when we wanted to walk in the garden, I sent the girl on some errand. I have sent her as far as Orleans to get rid of her for twenty-four hours. The rest of the time we staid upstairs, and waited upon ourselves."

M. Magloire was evidently suffering. "You must be under a mistake," he said. "Servants are curious, and if you hide anything from them they become mad with curiosity. That girl watched you, believe me. That girl found means to see the countess when she came there. She must be examined. Is she still in your service?"

"No, she left me when the war broke out, wishing to return to England, and it would be difficult to find her."

"We must give her up, then. But your man-servant? Old Anthony was in your confidence. Did you never tell him anything about it?"

"Never. Only once did I send for him to come to the Rue des Vignes, when I sprained my foot in coming downstairs."

"So that it is impossible for you to prove that the Countess de Clandieuse ever came to your house in Passy? You have no evidence of it, and no eye-witness?"

"I used to have evidence. She had brought a number of small articles for her private use; but they disappeared during the war."

"Ah yes!" said M. Magloire, "always the war! It has to answer for everything."

Never had any of M. Galpin-Daveline's examinations been half so painful to Jacques as M. Magloire's questions, which betrayed such distressing incredulity. "Did I not tell you, Magloire," he resumed, "that the countess had a genius for prudence? You can easily conceal yourself when you can spend money without counting it.

Would you blame me for not having any proofs to furnish? Is it not the duty of every man of honour to do all he can to keep even a shadow of suspicion from her who has confided herself to his hands? I did my duty, and whatever may come of it, I shall not regret it. Could I foresee such unheard-of emergencies? Could I foresee that : day might come when I, Jacques de Boiscoran, should have to denounce the Countess de Claudieuse, and should be compelled to search for evidence and witnesses against her?"

The eminent advocate of Sauveterre looked aside; and, instead of replying to these questions he merely exclaimed, "Well, what else have you to say?"

Jacques de Boiscoran tried to overcome his discouragement. "It was on the 2nd September, 1867," he said "that the Countess de Claudieuse entered this house at Passy for the first time. During the five weeks she spent that year in Paris, she came almost every day, and spent several hours there. At her father's house she enjoyed, absolute and almost uncontrolled independence. She left her daughter—for she had at that time but one child—with her mother, the Marchioness de Tassar; and she was free to go and come as she liked. When she wanted still greater freedom, she went to see her friend at Fontainebleau; and every time she did this, she secured twenty-four or forty eight hours over and above the time for the journey. I, for my part, was as perfectly free from all control. Ostensibly, I had gone to Ireland: in reality, I lived in the Rue des Vignes. These five weeks passed like a dream; and yet I must confess, the parting was not as painful as might have been supposed. Not that the bright prism was broken; but I always felt humiliated at the necessity of being concealed. I began to be tired of these incessant precautions; and I was quite ready to give up being Sir Francis Burnett, and to resume my identity. We had, besides, mutually promised never to remain a month without seeing each other, at least for a few hours; and she had invented a number of expedients by which we could meet without danger. A family misfortune came just then to our assistance. My father's eldest brother, the kind uncle who had furnished me with the means to purchase my house at Passy, died, and left me his entire fortune. As the owner of Boiscoran, I could, henceforth, live as

much as I chose in the province ; and at all events come there whenever I liked, without anybody inquiring the reason."

XIV.

JACQUES DE BOISCORAN was evidently anxious to make this part of his recital as brief as possible and to come at last to the Valpinson catastrophe, that he might learn from his legal adviser what he had to hope or fear. After a moment's silence, for his breast was well-nigh exhausted, he resumed in a bitter tone, " But why trouble you with all these details, Magloire ? Would you believe me any more than you do now, if I were to enumerate to you all my meetings with the Countess de Claudieuse, or if I were to repeat all her most trifling words. We had gradually learnt to calculate all our movements, and made our preparations so accurately that we met constantly, and feared no danger. We said to each other at parting, or she wrote to me, ' On such a day, at such an hour, at such a place ; and however distant the day, or the hour, or the place, we were sure to meet. I had soon learned to know the country as well as the cleverest of poachers ; and nothing was so useful to us as this familiarity with all the unknown hiding-places. The countess, on her side, never let three months pass by without discovering some urgent motive which carried her to Rochelle, Angoulême, or Paris ; and I was there to meet her. Nothing kept her from these excursions ; even when indisposed, she braved the fatigues of the journey. It is true, my life was well-nigh spent in travelling ; and at any moment, when least expected, I disappeared for whole weeks. This will explain to you the restlessness at which my father sneered, and for which you yourself, Magloire, used to blame me."

" That is true," replied the latter. " I remember."

Jacques de Boiscoran did not seem to notice the encouragement. " I should not tell the truth," he continued, " if I were to say that this kind of life was unpleasant to me. Mystery and danger always add zest to the charms of love. Difficulty only increases passion. But my infatuation was bound to come to an end. It had not taken me long to find out that I had given myself a master, the most imperious and exacting master that ever lived. I had almost

ceased to belong to myself. I had become her property ; and I lived and breathed and thought and acted for her alone. She did not mind my tastes and my dislikes. She wished a thing, and that was enough. At first I accepted her despotism with joy ; but gradually I became tired of this perpetual abdication of my own will. I disliked to have no control over myself, to be unable to dispose of twenty-four hours in advance. I began to feel the pressure of the halter around my neck. I thought of flight. One of my friends was to set out on a voyage around the world, which was to last eighteen months or two years, and I had an idea of accompanying him. There was nothing to retain me. I was, by fortune and position, perfectly independent. Why should I not carry out my plan ? Ah, why ? The prism was not broken yet. I cursed the countess's tyranny, but I still trembled when I heard her name mentioned. I thought of escaping from her ; but a single glance moved me to the bottom of my heart. I was bound to her by the thousand tender threads of habit and complicity—those threads which seem to be more delicate than gossamer, but which are harder to break than a ship's cable.

“When I uttered the word ‘separation’ for the first time in her presence, asking her what she would do if I left her, she looked at me with a strange air, and asked me, after a moment's hesitation, if I were serious, if it were a warning ! I dared not carry matters any farther, and, making an effort to smile, I replied that it was only a joke. ‘Then,’ she said, ‘let us not say anything more about it. If you should ever come to that, you would soon see what I would do.’ I did not insist ; but her look remained long in my memory, and made me feel that I was far more closely bound than I had thought. From that day it became my fixed idea to break with her.”

“Well, you ought to have made an end of it,” said Magloire.

Jacques de Boiscoran shook his head. “That is easily said,” he replied. “I tried it ; but I could not do it. Ten times I went to her, determined to say, ‘Let us part ;’ and ten times, at the last moment, my courage failed me. She irritated me. I almost began to hate her ; but I could not forget how much I had loved her, and how much she had risked for my sake. Then—why should I not confess it ?

—I was afraid of her. This inflexible character, which I had so much admired, terrified me; and I shuddered, seized with vague and sombre apprehensions, when I thought what she was capable of doing. I was thus in the utmost perplexity, when my mother spoke to me of a match she had long hoped for. This might be the pretext which I had so far failed to find. At all events, I asked for time to consider; and, on the next occasion when I saw the countess, I gathered all my courage together, and told her that my mother wished me to marry. She turned as pale as death; and looking me fixedly in the eyes, as if to read my innermost thoughts, she asked me if my mother's wish were mine. I replied with a forced laugh that I did not wish to marry at present, but that I should have to consider the matter by and by. A terrible scene ensued. She reproached me with having loved her as a pastime, with having made her the amusement of my youth, and asked me what was to become of her if I married. I was suffering terribly. 'You have your husband,' I stammered, 'your children'—She stopped me. 'Yes,' she said. 'I shall go back to live at Valpinson, in a district full of associations, where every spot recalls a rendezvous. I shall live with my husband, whom I have betrayed; with daughters, one of whom— That cannot be, Jacques.' I had a fit of courage. 'Still,' I said, 'I may have to marry. What would you do?' 'Oh, very little,' she replied, 'I should hand all your letters to the Count de Claudieuse.'"

During the thirty years which he had spent at the bar, M. Magloire had heard many a strange confession; but never in his life had he listened to so strange a recital. "That is utterly confounding," he murmured.

But Jacques went on,—“Was this threat meant in earnest? I don't know, but at all events I told her that I didn't believe it; still she swore by all she held dear and sacred in the world that such would be her line of conduct. She overwhelmed me with reproaches and declared that the bonds which bound us together—bonds riveted by long years of complicity—would not be easily broken. She declared that I belonged to her, and that thus I must remain, adding that, on the eve of my wedding-day, her husband would know all. 'I shall not survive the loss of my honour,' she said, 'but at least I shall have my revenge. Even if you escape the Count de Claudieuse's vengeance

your name will be bound up with such a tragic affair that your life will be ruined for ever.' That was the way she spoke, Magloire, and with a passion of which I can give you no idea. It was absurd, it was insane, I admit. But is not all passion absurd and insane? Besides, it was by no means a sudden inspiration of her pride, which made her threaten me with such vengeance. The precision of her phrases, the deliberation of her language, all made me feel that she had long meditated such a blow, and carefully calculated the effect of every word. I was thunderstruck, and eventually I told her that the marriage which I had mentioned had never existed as yet, except in my mother's imagination. She hesitated to believe me, but at last she seemed to be convinced of my veracity. I left her with fury in my heart. She had evidently deemed that I was to carry a halter round my neck for ever—a halter which held me tighter day by day. It was plain that at the slightest effort to free myself, I must be prepared for a terrible scandal; for one of those overwhelming adventures which destroy a man's whole life. Could I ever hope to make her listen to reason? No, I was quite sure I could not."

"I knew but too well that I should lose my time, if I were to recall to her that I was not quite as guilty as she tried to make me out; if I were to show her that her vengeance would fall less upon myself than upon her husband and her children; and that, although she might blame the count for the conditions of their marriage, her daughters, at least, were innocent. I looked in vain for an opening out of this horrible difficulty. Upon my honour Magloire, there were moments when I thought I would pretend getting married, for the purpose of inducing the countess to act, and of bringing about the execution of her threats. I fear no danger; but knowing it to exist, I cannot bear to wait for it with folded hands. I must go forth to meet it. Deliverance came for a time with a great calamity—the war. I lost sight of the countess, and when I returned to Boiscoran, after the conclusion of peace, she gave no signs of life. I began to feel reassured, and to recover possession of myself, when one day M. de Chandore asked me to dinner. I accepted his invitation, and met his granddaughter, Mademoiselle Denise, whom I had already seen. My knowledge of her then was perhaps an indirect reason for me to break off all connection with the countess.

Still I had hitherto studiously avoided Mademoiselle de Chandore, for fear lest the countess's vengeance should fall upon her, but when I was brought in contact with her by her grandfather, I had no longer the heart to avoid her ; and the day that I thought I read in her eyes that she loved me, I made up my mind, and declared myself. At the same time I was not without anxiety concerning the Countess de Claudieuse. I had no news of her, and yet I said to myself, she must have heard of my contemplated marriage, which was already currently reported throughout the province. Her silence really frightened me."

Exhausted and out of breath, Jacques de Boiscoran paused here, pressing both of his hands against his chest, as if to check the irregular beating of his heart. He was approaching the catastrophe. And yet he looked in vain for a word or a sign of encouragement from the advocate. M. Magloire remained impenetrable : his face was as impassive as an iron mask.

At last, with a great effort, Jacques resumed,—“ Yes, this calm frightened me more than a storm would have done. To win Denise's love was too great a piece of happiness. I expected a catastrophe, something terrible. I expected it with such absolute certainty, that I had actually made up my mind to confess everything to M. de Chandore. You know him, Magloire. The old gentleman is a pure type of honour and loyalty. I could intrust my secret to him with as perfect safety as I formerly intrusted Genevieve's name to the breezes of the night. Alas ! why did I hesitate ? why did I delay ? One word might have saved me ; and I should not be here, charged with an atrocious crime, innocent, and yet forced to see how plainly you doubt the truth of my words. But fate was against me.

“ After every day postponing my confession until the morrow, during an entire week, I went home one evening, saying :—‘ Within four and twenty hours it shall be done.’ But next morning, while out of doors in the neighbourhood of Boiscoran, I met the cure of Brechy, who is a friend of mine. He asked me to accompany him a short distance, and in reality we walked together as far as the cross-road which passes by Valpinson and the forest of Rochepommier. I was retracing my steps through the wood, when, all on a sudden, some twenty yards off, I saw the Countess

de Claudieuse coming towards me. Despite of my emotion, I kept on my way, determined to bow to her, but to pass without speaking. I did so, and had gone on a little distance, when I heard her call after me. I stopped, or, rather, I was nailed to the spot by that voice which for a long time had so entirely controlled my heart. She walked towards me, looking even more excited than I was. Her lips trembled, and her eyes wandered to and fro. 'Well,' she said, 'it is no longer a fancy : this time you are going to marry Mademoiselle de Chandore.' The time for half-measures had gone by. I answered 'Yes.' 'Then it is really true,' she said again. 'It is all over now. I suppose it would be in vain to remind you of those vows of eternal love which you used to repeat over and over again. Look at those old oaks. They are the same trees, this is the same landscape, and I am still the same woman ; but your heart has changed.' I made no reply. 'You love her very much, do you?' she asked me. I kept obstinately silent. 'I understand,' she said, 'I understand you but too well. And Denise? She loves you so much she cannot keep it to herself. She stops her friends to tell them all about her marriage, and to assure them of her happiness. Oh, yes, indeed, very happy ! The love which was my disgrace is her honour.' I was forced to conceal it like a crime : she can display it as a virtue. Social forms are, after all, very absurd and unjust ; but he is a fool who tries to defy them.' Tears, the very first tears I had ever seen her shed, glittered in her long silky eyelashes."

The recollection seemed to move Jacques even now. His speech faltered, but after a moment he resumed again :—" 'And you,' she said after a short pause,—'are you happy?' I answered that I could not be completely happy as long as I knew that she was unhappy ; still there is no sorrow which time does not heal. You will forget'—'Never,' she cried. And, lowering her voice, she added,—'Can I forget you? Alas ! my crime is fearful ; but the punishment is still more so.' After a moment she said again,—'Well, and when is the wedding?' I hesitated. She herself insisted upon an explanation. 'No day has yet been fixed,' I replied : 'had I not to see you first? You uttered some grave threats once upon a time.' 'And you were afraid?' she asked. I told her 'no,' adding that I believed I knew her too well to fancy she would punish

me for having loved her. 'Besides,' said I, 'so many things have happened since the day when you made those threats!' 'Yes,' she replied, 'many things indeed! My poor father is incorrigible. Once more he has committed himself fearfully; and once more my husband has been compelled to sacrifice a large sum to save him. Ah, the Count de Claudieuse has a noble heart; and it is a great pity I should be the only one towards whom he has failed to show generosity. Such kindness as he shows me is a fresh grievance for me; and yet, by my tacit acceptance of his affection, I have forfeited the right to strike him, as I intended to do. You may marry Denise, Jacques: you have nothing to fear from me.'"

At this point of his recital M. de Boiscoran took two or three hasty strides up and down his cell. "Ah! I had not hoped for so much, Magloire," he said. "Overcome with joy, I seized her hand, and, raising it to my lips, I exclaimed,—'You are the kindest of friends!' But promptly, as if my lips had burnt her hand, she drew it back, and replied, turning very pale,—'No, don't do that!' Then, overcoming her emotion to a certain degree, she added,—'But we must meet once more. You have my letters, I dare say.' 'I have them all,' I answered. 'Well,' she said, 'you must bring them to me. But where? and how? I can hardly absent myself at this time. My youngest daughter—our daughter, Jacques—is very ill. Still, an end must be made. Let us see, on Thursday—are you free then? Yes? Very well, then, come on Thursday evening to Valpinson at about nine o'clock. You will find me at the edge of the wood, near the towers of the old castle.' I asked her if she thought this prudent; she replied that there was no danger. We then parted, and I returned to Sauveterre. It had now become useless for me to confide my secret to M. de Chandore. I felt so happy, and my face bore such evident signs of relief, that Denise exclaimed 'Something very pleasant must have happened to you, Jacques.' 'Oh, yes, very pleasant!' I answered. For the first time I breathed freely as I sat by her side. I could love her now, without fear of my love proving fatal to her. But this security did not last long. On consideration, I thought it very singular that the countess should have chosen such a place for our meeting. 'Can it be a trap?' I asked myself; and all day long on

Thursday I had the most painful presentiments. If I had known how to warn the countess, I should certainly not have gone. But I had no means to send her word; and I knew her well enough to be sure that if I broke my word I should expose myself to her vengeance. I dined at the usual hour; and, when I had finished, I went up to my room and wrote to Denise not to expect me that evening, as I should be detained by a matter of the utmost importance. This note was taken to Sauveterre by Michael, one of my tenant's sons, and then I tied all of the countess's letters together, put them in my pocket, took my gun, and went out. It might have been eight o'clock; but it was still light."

Whether M. Magloire accepted everything that the prisoner said as truth, or not, he was evidently deeply interested. He had drawn up his chair, and uttered some fresh exclamation at every statement.

"Under any other circumstances," said Jacques, "I should have taken one of the two public roads in going to Valpinson. But troubled, as I was, by vague suspicions, I thought only of concealing myself, and cut across the marshes. They had partly overflowed; but I counted upon my intimate familiarity with the ground, and my agility. I thought, moreover, that by taking this route I should certainly not be seen. In this I was mistaken. When I reached the Seille Canal, and was just about to cross it, I found myself face to face with young Ribot, the son of a Brechy farmer. He looked so surprised at seeing me in such a place, that I thought I ought to give him some explanation; and, rendered stupid by my troubles, I told him I had business at Brechy, and was crossing the marshes to shoot some birds. 'If that is so,' he replied, laughing, 'we are not after the same kind of game.' He went his way; but this accident annoyed me seriously. I continued on my way, swearing, I fear, at young Ribot, and found that the path became more and more and dangerous. It was long past nine when at last I reached Valpinson. The spot which the countess had chosen for our meeting was about two hundred yards from the chateau and the farm buildings, and quite close to the wood through which I approached it. Hidden among the trees, I was examining the ground, when I noticed the countess standing near one of the old towers; she wore a simple

costume of light muslin, which could be seen at a distance. Finding everything quiet, I went up to her. She told me that she had been waiting for me nearly an hour; whereupon I explained the difficulty I had had in coming, and asked after her husband. She told me that he was laid up with the rheumatism, but that he would not wonder at her absence, presuming that she was sitting up with her youngest child. She added that she had left the house by the laundry door, and then at once asked me for her letters. She counted them, remarking that there ought to be eighty-four. Such conduct was insulting on her part, but she did not seem to notice it. When she had ascertained that all her notes were there she drew a packet from her bosom. This packet comprised the letters I had written to her. I expected her to give them to me, but to my surprise, she proposed that we should burn both packages together. I argued that this would be most imprudent, as a fire might be seen. Still she persisted in her idea and asked me if I had any matches. I found I had none, whereupon she stamped her foot vehemently. 'Since that is the case,' she said, 'I'll go indoors and get some.' This would have delayed us, and might have proved an additional imprudence. I saw that I must do what she wanted, and accordingly I took a cartridge out of my gun and emptied it of its shot, which I replaced with a piece of paper. Then, resting my gun on the ground, so as to prevent a loud report, I made the powder flash. We had fire at once; and the letters were immediately ignited. A few minutes later nothing was left of them but a few blackened fragments, which I crumbled in my hands, and scattered to the winds. Immovable, like a statue, the countess had watched my operations. 'And those ashes are all,' she said, 'that remain of five years of our life, of our love, and of your vows.' I replied by a commonplace remark: for I was in a hurry to be gone—a circumstance which she noticed, for she suddenly exclaimed with great vehemence, 'Ah, I inspire you with horror!' The scene which followed was distressing in the extreme. She overloaded me with reproaches, and at last in a spasm of agony she cried, 'Confess that you never really loved me.' I replied that she knew the contrary. 'And Denise?' she asked. 'You are married,' said I. 'You cannot be my wife.' 'But supposing I was free,' she resumed; 'if I

had been a widow?' 'Ah, Genevieve,' I cried, 'then you would have been my wife.' At these words she raised her arms to heaven, and in a voice which I thought could be heard in the house, cried, 'His wife! If I were a widow, I should be his wife! O God! Luckily, that thought, that terrible thought, never occurred to me before.'"

All of a sudden, as Jacques repeated these words, M. Magloire rose from his chair, and placing himself in front of the prisoner, on whom he darted one of those glances which pierce a man's innermost soul, he asked, "And then?"

Jacques had to summon all his remaining energy before he was able to reply,—“Then I tried everything in the world to quiet the countess, to move her, and bring her back to the generous feelings of former days. I was so completely upset that I hardly knew what I was saying. I hated her bitterly, and still I could not help pitying her. I am a man; and there is no man living who would not have been moved at seeing himself the object of such bitter regrets and such terrible despair. Besides, my happiness and Denise's honour were at stake. How do I know what I said? I am not a hero of romance. No doubt I was mean. I humbled myself, I besought her, I told falsehoods, I vowed to her that it was my family, mainly, who made me marry. I hoped I should be able, by great kindness and caressing words, to soften the bitterness of the parting. She remained as impassive as a block of ice; and when I paused she said with a sinister laugh,—‘And you tell me all that! Your Denise! Ah! if I were a woman like other women, I should say nothing to-day, and, before the year was over, you would again be at my feet.’ She must have been thinking of our meeting at the cross-roads. Or was this the last outburst of passion at the moment when the final ties were broken off? I was going to speak again; but she interrupted me brusquely, saying, ‘Oh, that is enough! Spare me, at least, the insult of your pity! I’ll see. I promise nothing. Good-bye!’ So saying she ran towards the house, while I remained rooted to the spot, almost stupefied, and asking myself if she was not, perhaps at that moment, telling the Count de Claudieuse everything that had transpired. It was at that moment I drew the burnt cartridge from my gun almost

mechanically, and inserted a fresh one. Then, as nothing stirred, I went off with a rapid stride."

"What time was it?" asked M. Magloire

"I could not tell you precisely. My state of mind was such, that I had lost all idea of time. I went back through the forest of Rochepommier."

"And you saw nothing?"

"No."

"Heard nothing?"

"Nothing."

"Still, from your statement, you could not have been far from Valpinson when the fire broke out."

"That is true, and in the open country I should certainly have seen the fire; but I was in a dense wood: the trees cut off all view."

"And these same trees prevented the sound of the two shots fired at Count Claudieuse from reaching your ear?"

"They might have helped to prevent it; but there was no need for that. I was walking against the wind which was very high; and it is an established fact, that under such circumstances the sound of a gun is not heard beyond fifty yards."

M. Magloire once more could hardly restrain his impatience; and, utterly unconscious that he was even harsher than the magistrate, he said, "And you think your statement explains everything?"

"I believe that my statement, which is founded upon the most exact truth, explains the charges brought against me by M. Galpin Daveline. It explains how I tried to keep my visit to Valpinson a secret: how I was met in going and coming back, at hours which correspond with the time of the fire. It explains, finally, why at first I refused to speak, how one of my cartridge-cases was found near the ruins, and why I had to wash my hands when I reached home."

Nothing seemed to be able to shake the lawyer's conviction. "And the day after, when they came to arrest you," he asked, "what was your first impression?"

"I thought at once of Valpinson."

"And when you were told that a crime had been committed?"

"I said to myself, 'The countess wants to be a widow.'"

All M. Magloire's blood seemed to rush to his face

"Unhappy man!" he cried. "How can you dare to accuse the Countess de Claudieuse of such a crime?"

Indignation gave Jacques strength to reply, "Whom else should I accuse? A crime has been committed, and under such circumstances that it can only have been committed by her or by myself. I am innocent; consequently she is guilty."

"Why did you not say so at once?"

Jacques shrugged his shoulders, and replied in a tone of bitter irony,—"How many times, and in how many ways, do you want me to give you my reasons? I kept silent the first day, because I did not then know the circumstances of the crime, and because I was reluctant to accuse a woman who had given me her love, and who had become criminal from passion; because, in fine, I did not think at that time that I was in danger. Afterwards I kept silent because I hoped that justice would succeed in discovering the truth, or that the countess would be unable to bear the idea that I, the innocent one, should be accused. Still later, when I saw my danger, I was afraid."

"You do not tell the truth," urged the advocate impatiently, "and I will tell you why you kept silent. It is difficult to make up a story that shall account for everything. But you are a clever man: you thought the matter over, and concocted this story in which there is nothing lacking except probability. You might tell me that the Countess de Claudieuse has unfairly enjoyed the reputation of a saint, and that she has given you her love; perhaps I might be willing to believe it. But when you say she set her own house on fire, and took up a gun to shoot her husband, that I can never, never credit."

"Still it is the truth."

"No; for the evidence of the Count de Claudieuse is precise. He saw his murderer: it was a man who fired at him."

"And who tells you that the Count de Claudieuse does not know everything, and wants to save his wife and ruin me? There would be a vengeance for him."

This objection took the advocate by surprise; but he rejected it at once, "Ah! be silent," he cried, "or prove what you say."

"All the letters are burned."

"When one has been a woman's lover for five years, there are always proofs."

"But you see there are none."

"Do not insist," repeated M. Magloire. And, in a voice full of pity and emotion, he added, "Unhappy man! Do you not feel that, in order to escape from one crime, you are committing another which is a thousand times worse?"

Jacques wrung his hands. "It is enough to drive me mad," he cried.

"And even if I, your friend," continued M. Magloire, "should believe you, how would that help you? Would any one else believe it? Look here, I will tell you exactly what I think. Even if I were perfectly sure of all the facts you mention, I should never plead them in my defence, unless I had proofs. To plead them, understand me well, would be to ruin yourself inevitably."

"Still they must be pleaded; for they are the truth."

"Then," said M. Magloire, "you must look for another advocate." So saying he walked towards the door. He was on the point of leaving, when Jacques cried out, almost in agony,—*"Great God, he forsakes me!"*

"No," replied the advocate; "but I cannot discuss matters with you in the state of excitement in which you now are. You will think the matter over, and I will come again to-morrow." With these words he left the cell. Utterly undone, Jacques sank down on one of the prison chairs. "It is all over," he stammered: "I am lost!"

XV.

IN the meanwhile all the inmates of M. de Chandore's house were suffering intense anxiety. At eight o'clock in the morning the two aunts, the old gentleman, the marchioness, and M. Folgat assembled in the drawing-room, where they remained waiting to know the result of M. Magloire's interview with the prisoner. Denise, who came downstairs somewhat later, was, as every one remarked, more carefully dressed than usual, having actually persuaded herself that one word from Jacques would suffice to convince the celebrated lawyer, and that he would re-appear triumphant on M. Magloire's arm. After a couple of

hours had been passed, in anxious expectation, the party were joined by M. Seneschal, and subsequently by Dr. Seignebois, but it was not until a few minutes past eleven o'clock that a servant opened the door, and announced, "M. Magloire."

The eminent advocate looked so gloomy that every one shared the thought which, crossing Denise's mind, led her to exclaim, "Jacques is lost!"

"I believe he is in danger," replied M. Magloire.

"Jacques," murmured the old marchioness, "my son!"

"I said in danger," repeated the advocate; "but I ought to have said, that he is in a strange, almost incredible, unnatural position."

"Let us hear," exclaimed the marchioness.

The lawyer was evidently very much embarrassed, and looked with unmistakable distress, first at Denise, and then at the two aunts. Nobody noticing his glance, he at length remarked, "I must ask to be left alone with these gentlemen."

The Demoiselles de Lavarande rose in the most docile manner and led their niece and Jacques's mother, the latter of whom was evidently near fainting, out of the room with them. As soon as the door was shut, Grandpapa Chandore, oppressed with grief, excitedly exclaimed, "Thanks, M. Magloire, thanks for having given me time to prepare my poor child for the terrible blow. I see but too well what you are going to say. Jacques is guilty."

"Stop," replied the advocate: "I have said nothing of the kind. M. de Boiscoran still protests energetically that he is innocent; but his defence is based on a fact which is so entirely improbable, so utterly inadmissible—"

"But what does he say?" asked M. Seneschal impatiently.

"He says that the Countess de Claudieuse was his mistress, and accuses her of being the guilty party."

Dr. Seignebois started, and, re-adjusting his spectacles, cried triumphantly, "I said so! I guessed it!"

Naturally enough, M. Folgat had no deliberative voice on this occasion. He came from Paris with Parisian ideas; and, whatever he might have been told, the name of the Countess de Claudieuse had for him no particular signification. From the effect which it produced upon the others, however, he could judge what Jacques's accu-

sation meant. Far from being of the doctor's opinion, M. de Chandore and M. Seneschal both seemed to be quite as much shocked as M. Magloire.

"It is incredible," said the first.

"It is impossible," added the other. M. Magloire shook his head. "That is exactly what I told Jacques," he remarked. Regardless, however, of what others might say, the doctor was not the man to forego his personal opinion.

"Don't you hear what I say?" he exclaimed. "Don't you understand me? The proof that the thing is neither so incredible nor so impossible is, that I suspected it. And there were signs of it, moreover. Why on earth should a man like Jacques, young, rich, and handsome, in love with a charming girl, and beloved by her, why should he amuse himself with setting houses on fire, and killing people? You tell me he did not like the Count de Claudieuse. Upon my word! If everybody who does not like Dr. Seignebos were to come and fire at him forthwith, my my body would look like a sieve! Among you all, M. Folgat is the only one who has not been absolutely blind." The young lawyer would have protested: but the doctor cut him short. "Yes, sir," he said, turning to M. Folgat, "you saw it all; and the proof of it is, that you at once went to work in search of the real motive of this crime—the heart,—in search of the woman who was at the bottom of the riddle. The proof of it is, that you moreover went and asked everybody,—Anthony, M. de Chandore, M. Seneschal, and myself,—if M. de Boiscoran had not now, or had not previously had, some love-affair in the district. Every one said No, being far from suspecting the truth. I alone, without giving you a positive answer, told you that I thought as you did, and told you so in M. de Chandore's presence."

"That is true!" replied the old gentleman and M. Folgat.

Dr. Seignebos was radiant with triumph. Still gesticulating, he added,—“You see I have learnt to mistrust appearances; and hence I had my misgivings from the beginning. I watched the Countess de Claudieuse the night of the fire; and I saw that she looked embarrassed, troubled, suspicious. I wondered at her readiness to yield to M. Galpin's whim, and to allow Cocoleu to be exam-



“Immovable, like a statue, the Countess had watched my operations.”

ined ; for I knew that she was the only one who could ever make that so-called idiot talk. You see I have good eyes, gentlemen, in spite of my spectacles. Well, I swear by all I hold most sacred, on my Republican faith, I am ready to affirm upon oath, that when Cocoleu uttered Jacques de Boiscoran's name, the countess exhibited no sign of surprise. On the contrary, her eyes expressed fierce, bitter hatred, joy and vengeance. And that is not all. When the Count de Claudieuse was roused by the fire, was the countess with him? No, she was nursing her youngest daughter, who had the measles. Hm ! what do you think of measles which make sitting up at night-time necessary? And when the two shots were fired, where was the countess then? Still with her daughter, on the opposite side of the house where the conflagration commenced."

"I beg you will notice, doctor," retorted M. Seneschal, "that the Count de Claudieuse himself deposed, that when he ran to the fire, he found the door shut from within, just as he had left it a few hours before."

Dr. Seignebos bowed ironically. "Is there really only one door in the chateau at Valpinson?" he asked.

"To my knowledge," said M. de Chandore, "there are at least three."

"And I must say," added M. Magloire, "that, according to M. de Boiscoran's statement the countess went out by the laundry-door when she came to meet him that evening."

"What did I say?" exclaimed the doctor. Then, wiping his glasses in a perfect rage, he added,— "And the children! Does M. Seneschal think it natural that the Countess de Claudieuse,—this incomparable mother in his estimation—should forget her children in the height of the fire?"

"What! The poor woman is called out by the discharge of fire-arms; she sees her house on fire, stumbles over the lifeless body of her husband, and you blame her for not having preserved all her presence of mind."

"That is one view of it; but it is not the one I take. I rather think that the countess, having been delayed out of doors, was prevented by the fire from re-entering the house. I think also that Cocoleu came by very opportunely; and that it was very lucky Providence should in

spire his mind with that sublime idea of saving the children at the risk of his life. Supported by all these facts," continued the doctor, seeing that M. Seneschal didn't venture to raise any fresh objection, "my suspicions became so strong that I determined to ascertain the truth if I could. The next day I questioned the countess, and, I must confess, rather treacherously. Her replies and her looks were not such as to modify my views. When I asked her looking straight into her eyes, what she thought of Cocoleu's mental condition, she nearly fainted; and I could scarcely hear her when she said that she had occasionally caught glimpses of intelligence in him. When I asked her if Cocoleu was fond of her, she said, in a most embarrassed manner, that his devotion was that of an animal which is grateful for the care taken of him. What do you think of that, gentlemen? To me it appeared that Cocoleu was at the bottom of the whole affair; that he knew the truth; and that I should be able to save Jacques, if I could prove Cocoleu's imbecility to be assumed, and his speechlessness to be an imposture. And I would have proved it, if they had associated with me any one else but an ass of Sauverterre and a jackanapes from Paris." The doctor paused for a few seconds; but, before any one had time to reply, he went on again. "Now, let us go back to our point of departure, and draw our conclusions. Why do you think it so improbable and impossible that the Countess de Claudieuse should have betrayed her duties? Because she has a world-wide reputation for purity and prudence? Well, but was not Jacques de Boiscoran's reputation as a man of honour also above all doubt? According to your views, it is absurd to suspect the countess of having had a lover. According to my notions, it is absurd that Jacques should, within a few hours, have become a scoundrel."

"Oh! that is not the same thing," said M. Seneschal.

"Certainly not!" replied the doctor, "and there you are right for once. If M. de Boiscoran had committed this offence, it would be one of those absurd crimes which revolt us; but, if committed by the countess, it is only the catastrophe prepared by the Count de Claudieuse himself on the day when he married a woman thirty years younger than he was."

The doctor had said quite enough to make his friends very thoughtful. "You would have converted me, doctor,"

remarked M. Folgat, "if I had not been of your opinion before."

"I am sure," added M. de Chandore, "the thing no longer looks impossible."

"Nothing is impossible," said M. Seneschal, like a philosopher.

The eminent advocate of Sauveterre alone remained unmoved. "Well," said he, "I would rather admit one hour of utter insanity even than five years of such monstrous hypocrisy. Jacques may have committed the crime, and be nothing but a madman; but, if the countess is guilty, one might despair of mankind, and renounce all faith in this world. I have seen her, gentlemen, with her husband and her children. No one can feign such looks of tenderness and affection."

"He will never give her up!" growled Dr. Seignebos, and touching his friend on the shoulder,—for M. Magloire had been his bosom companion for many years,—he added:—"Ah! There I recognise my friend, the strange lawyer, who judges others by himself, and refuses to believe in anything bad. Oh, do not protest! for we love and honour you for that very faith, and are proud to see you among us Republicans. But I must confess you are not the man to enlighten such a dark intrigue. At twenty-eight you married a girl whom you loved dearly: you lost her, and ever since you have remained faithful to her memory, and lived so far from all passions that you no longer believe in their existence. Happy man! Your heart is still at twenty; and with your gray hair you still believe in woman's tender looks."

There was much truth in this; but there are certain truths which we are not over-fond of hearing. "My simplicity has nothing to do with the matter," said M. Magloire. "I affirm and maintain that a man who has been a woman's lover for five years must possess some proof of the intimacy."

"Well, there you are mistaken, sir," said the physician, arranging his spectacles with an air of self-conceit, which, under other circumstances, would, have been irresistibly ludicrous.

"When women determine to be prudent and suspicious," remarked M. de Chandore, "they never are so by halves."

"It is evident, besides," added M. Folgat, "that the Countess de Claudieuse would never have determined upon so bold a crime, if she had not been quite sure, that after the burning of her letters, no proof could be brought against her."

"That's it!" cried the doctor.

M. Magloire did not conceal his impatience. "Unfortunately, gentlemen," he said dryly, "it does not depend on you either to acquit or condemn M. de Boiscoran. I am not here to convince you, or to be convinced: I came to discuss our line of conduct, and the basis of our defence."

M. Magloire was evidently right in this estimate of his duty. Rising from his chair he went and leant against the mantelpiece; then, when the others had taken their seats around him, he began,—“In the first place, I will admit M. de Boiscoran's allegations. He is innocent. He has been the Countess de Claudieuse's lover, but he has no proof of it. This being granted, what is to be done? Shall I advise him to send for the investigating magistrate, and to confess it all!”

No one replied at first. It was only after a long silence that Dr. Seignebois said, "That would be a very serious step."

"Very serious, indeed," repeated the advocate. "Our own feelings give us the measure of what M. Galpin will think. First of all, he also will ask for proof, the evidence of a witness, anything, in fact. And, when Jacques tells him that he has nothing to give but his word, M. Galpin will tell him that he does not speak the truth."

"He might, perhaps, consent to extend the investigation," said M. Seneschal. "He might possibly summon the countess."

M. Magloire nodded affirmatively. "He would certainly summon her," he said. "But, then, would she confess? It would be madness to expect that. If she is guilty, she is far too strong-minded to let the truth escape her. She would deny everything, haughtily, magnificently, and in such a manner as not to leave a shadow of doubt."

"That is only too probable," growled the doctor. "Galpin is not the strongest of men."

"What would be the result of such a step?" asked M. Magloire. "M. de Boiscoran's case would be a hundred

times worse ; for the odium of the meanest, vilest, calumny would be added to his crime."

M. Folgat was following with the utmost attention. "I am very glad to hear my honourable colleague give utterance to that opinion," he said. "We must give up all idea of delaying the proceedings, and let M. de Boiscoran go into court at once."

M. de Chandore raised his hands to heaven, as if in sheer despair. "But Denise will die of grief and shame," he exclaimed.

"Well," continued M. Magloire, regardless of this last interruption, "suppose we are before the court at Sauvetterre, before a jury composed of people from the district, incapable of prevarication, I am sure, but, unfortunately, under the influence of that public opinion which has long since condemned M. de Boiscoran. The proceedings begin ; the judge questions the accused. Will he say what he told me,—that, after having been the Countess de Claudieuse's lover he went to Valpinson to carry her back her letters, and to get his own, and that they are all burnt? Suppose he says so. Immediately there will arise a storm of indignation ; and he will be overwhelmed with curses and contempt. Well, thereupon, the president of the court uses his discretionary powers, suspends the trial, and sends for the Countess de Claudieuse. Since we look upon her as guilty, we must needs endow her with supernatural energy. She will have foreseen what is coming, and will have prepared her part. When summoned, she appears, pale, dressed in black ; and a murmur of respectful sympathy greets her entrance. You see her before you, don't you? The president explains to her why she has been sent for, and she does not comprehend. She cannot possibly comprehend such an abominable calumny. But when she has comprehended it? Do you not see the lofty look by which she crushes Jacques, and the grandeur with which she replies, 'When this man had failed in his endeavour to murder my husband, he tried to disgrace his wife. I entrust to your keeping my honour as a mother and a wife, gentlemen. I shall not answer the infamous charges of this abject calumniator.'"

"And that means the galleys for Jacques," exclaimed M. de Chandore, "or even the scaffold!"

"That would be the maximum, at all events," replied

the advocate of Sauveterre. "But the trial goes on; the public prosecutor demands an overwhelming punishment; and at last the prisoner's counsel is called upon to speak. Gentlemen, you were impatient at my persistence. I confess I do not credit M. de Boiscoran's statement. But my young colleague here does credit it. Well, let him tell us candidly. Would he dare to plead this statement, and assert that the Countess de Claudieuse had been Jacques's mistress?"

M. Folgat looked annoyed. "I don't know," he said in an undertone.

"Well, I know you would not," exclaimed M. Magloire: "and you would be right, for you would risk your reputation without the slightest chance of saving Jacques. Yes, no chance whatever! for after all, let us suppose, even if you did prove that Jacques has told the truth, that he was the countess's lover, what would happen then? They would arrest the countess. Would they release M. de Boiscoran on that account? Certainly not! They would keep him in prison, and say to him, 'This woman has tried to murder her husband; she was your mistress, and you are her accomplice.' That is the situation, gentlemen!"

Grandpapa Chandore was terrified by this *expose*. He rose, and in an almost inaudible voice exclaimed, "Ah, all is over indeed! Innocent, or guilty, Jacques de Boiscoran will be condemned." M. Magloire made no reply. "And that," continued the old gentleman, "is what you call justice!"

"Alas!" sighed M. Seneschal, "it is useless to deny it: trials by jury are a lottery—"

M. de Chandore, driven nearly crazy by his despair, interrupted him,—“In other words, Jacques's honour and life depend at this hour on a chance,—on the weather on the day of his trial, or the health of a juror. And if Jacques were the only one! but there is Denise, gentlemen, my poor child's life, is also at stake. If you strike Jacques, you strike Denise!”

M. Folgat could hardly restrain himself. M. Seneschal, and even the doctor, sympathised with the old man's grief. Was he not threatened in his nearest, his dearest affection—in his one great love upon earth? He had taken the hand of the great advocate of Sauveterre, and pressing it convulsively, "You will save him, Magloire,

won't you?" he stammered. "What does it matter whether he be innocent or guilty, since Denise loves him? You have saved so many in your life! It is well known the judges cannot resist the weight of your words. You will find means to save a poor, unhappy man who was once your friend."

The eminent lawyer looked cast down, as if he had been guilty himself. Dr. Seignebos saw this, and exclaimed, "What do you mean, friend Magloire? Are you no longer the man whose marvellous eloquence is the pride of our country? Hold your head up: for shame! Never was a nobler cause entrusted to you."

But the advocate shook his head, and murmured,—“I have no faith in it, as I have already explained to you; and I cannot plead when my conscience does not furnish the arguments,” then in a more embarrassed tone he added,—“Seignebos was right in saying just now, that I am not the man for such a cause. All my experience would be of no use. It will be better to intrust it to my young brother here.”

For the first time in his life, M. Folgat had met with a case such as enables a man to rise to eminence—a case which might ensure him a great future. In the Valpinson affair all the elements of supreme interest were united—magnitude of crime, eminence of the victim, character of the accused, mystery, variation of opinion, difficulty of defence, and uncertainty of issue,—in a word it was one of those cases to which an advocate devotes all his energies, and in which he shares all his client's anxiety and hopes. He would readily have sacrificed five years' income to be entrusted with the management of the defence; but he was, above all, an honest man. Accordingly, he asked, “You would not think of abandoning M. de Boiscoran, M. Magloire?”

“You will be more useful to him than I can be,” was the reply.

Perhaps M. Folgat was inwardly of the same opinion. Still he said,—“You have not considered what an effect this would have. What would the public think if they heard all of a sudden that you had withdrawn? They would say, ‘M. de Boiscoran's affair must be a very bad one indeed for M. Magloire to refuse to plead for him’—And such a comment would prove an additional blow for the prisoner.”

At this point the doctor interposed. "Magloire is not at liberty to withdraw," he said; "but he has the right to associate a brother-lawyer with himself. He must remain M. de Boiscoran's advocate and counsel, but M. Folgat can lend him the assistance of his advice, the support of his youth, his activity, and eloquence."

A passing blush coloured the young lawyer's cheeks. "I am entirely at M. Magloire's service," he said.

The famous advocate of Sauveterre considered a while. After a few moments he turned to his young colleague, and asked him,—“Have you any plan? any idea? What would you do?”

Then it was that to every one's astonishment, M. Folgat revealed in a measure his true character. He looked taller, his face brightened up, his eyes shone, and his voice had a sonorous metallic ring, as he replied, "First of all, I should go and see M. de Boiscoran with the view of arriving at a final decision. Still I have already formed a plan. I, gentlemen, I have faith, as I told you before. I do not believe the man whom Mademoiselle Denise loves to be a criminal. You ask, what would I do?—I would prove the truth of M. de Boiscoran's statement. Can that be done? I hope so. He tells us that there are no proofs nor witnesses of his intimacy with the Countess de Claudieuse. I am sure he is mistaken. She has shown, he says, extraordinary care and prudence. That may be. But mistrust challenges suspicion; and when you take the greatest precautions, you are most likely to be watched. You want to hide, and you are discovered. You see nobody; but others see you. If I were charged with the defence, therefore, I should commence to-morrow a counter-investigation. We have money, the Marquis de Boiscoran has influential connections; and we should have help everywhere. Before forty-eight hours are over, I should have experienced agents at work. I know the Rue des Vignes at Passy: it is a lonely street; but it has eyes, as all streets have. Why should not some of those eyes have noticed the countess's mysterious visits? My agents would inquire from house to house. Nor would it be necessary to mention names. They would not be charged with a search after the Countess de Claudieuse, but after an unknown lady, dressed so and so; and, if they should discover any one who had seen her, and who could

identify her, that man would be our first witness. In the mean time, I should go in search of M. de Boiscoran's friend, the Englishman, whose name he assumed; and the London police would aid me in my efforts. If that Englishman is dead, we should hear of it, and it would be a misfortune. If he is only at the other end of the world, the transatlantic cable enables us to question him, and to be answered in a week. I should, at the same time, send detectives after the English maid-servant who attended to the house at the Rue des Vignes. M. de Boiscoran declares that she never even caught a glimpse of the countess. I do not believe it. A servant is naturally curious, and, despite the obstacles thrown in her way, is bound to have seen the woman who visits her master. And that is not all. There were other people who came to the house in the Rue des Vignes. I should examine them one by one,—the gardener and his help, the water-carrier, the upholsterer, the trades-people's errand boys. Who can say whether one of them is not in possession of the facts which we are seeking? Finally, when a woman has spent so many days in a house, it is almost impossible that she should not have left some traces of her passage behind her. Since then, you will say, there has been the war, and afterwards the Commune. Nevertheless, I should examine the ruins, every tree in the garden, every pane in the windows if necessary: I should compel the very mirrors that have escaped destruction to give me back the image which they have so often reflected."

"Ah, I call that speaking!" cried the doctor full of enthusiasm.

The others trembled with excitement. They felt that the struggle was commencing. But, unmindful of the impression he had produced, M. Folgat went on,—“Here, in Sauveterre the task would be more difficult; but, in case of success, the result, also, would be more decisive. I should bring down from Paris one of those keen, subtle detectives who have made their profession an art, and I should know how to stimulate his vanity. He, of course, would have to be told everything, even the names; but there would be no danger in that. His desire to succeed, the splendour of the reward, even his professional habits, would be our security. He would come down secretly, concealed under whatever disguise would appear to him

most useful for his purpose ; and he would recommence, for the benefit of the defence, the investigation carried on by M. Galpin for the benefit of the prosecution. Would he discover anything? We can but hope so. I know detectives, who, by the aid of smaller material, have unravelled far deeper mysteries."

Grandpapa Chandore, M. Seneschal, Dr. Seignebos, and even M. Magloire, were literally drinking in the Paris advocate's words.

"But that is not all, gentlemen," he continued. "By no means! Thanks to his great experience, Dr. Seignebos had, on the very first day, instinctively guessed who was the most important personage of this drama, Cocoleu! Whether he be actor, confidant, or eye-witness, Cocoleu has evidently the key to this mystery. This key we must make every effort to obtain from him. Medical experts have declared him idiotic; nevertheless, we protest. We claim that the imbecility of this wretch is partly assumed. We maintain that his obstinate silence is a vile imposture. What! he should have intelligence enough to testify against us, and yet not have enough of it now left to explain, or even to repeat his evidence? That is inadmissible. We maintain that he keeps silence now just as he spoke that night,—by order. If his silence were less profitable for the prosecution, they would soon find some means to break it. We demand that such means should be employed. We demand that the person who has before been able to loosen his tongue should be sent for, and ordered to try the experiment over again. We call for a new examination by experts: for it is not possible in forty-eight hours to judge of a man's true mental condition, especially when that man is suspected of being an impostor. And we require, above all, that the new experts should be duly qualified by knowledge and experience."

Dr. Seignebos was quivering with excitement. He heard all his own ideas repeated in a concise, energetic manner. "Yes," he cried, "that is the way to accomplish it! Let me have full power, and in less than a fortnight Cocoleu is unmasked."

Less expansive than Dr. Seignebos, the eminent advocate of Sauveterre simply shook hands with M. Folgat. "You see," said he, "M. de Boiscoran's case ought to be placed in your hands."

The young lawyer made no effort to protest. When he began to speak, his determination was already formed. "Whatever can humbly be done," he replied, "I will do. If I accept the task, I shall devote heart and soul to it. But I insist, and it must be publicly announced, that M. Magloire does not withdraw from the case, and that I act only as his junior."

"Agreed," said the old advocate.

"Well. When shall we go and see M. de Boiscoran?"

"To-morrow morning."

"I can, of course, take no steps till I have seen him."

"No; and you cannot be admitted, except by a special permission from M. Galpin; and I doubt if we can procure one to-day."

"That is provoking."

"No, since we have our work all cut out for to-day. We have to go over all the papers of the proceedings, which the magistrate has placed in my hands."

Dr. Seignebos was boiling over with impatience. "Oh, what words!" he interrupted. "Go to work, Mr. Advocate, to work, I say. Come, shall we be off?"

They were leaving the room when M. de Chandore summoned them back by a gesture. "So far, gentlemen," he said, "we have thought of Jacques alone. What about Denise?" The others looked at him, full of surprise.

"What am I to say if she questions me concerning the result of M. Magloire's interview with Jacques, and why you would say nothing in her presence?"

"You will tell her the truth," said Dr. Seignebos.

"What! How can I tell her that Jacques was the Countess de Claudieuse's lover?"

"She will hear of it sooner or later. Mademoiselle Denise is a sensible, energetic girl."

"Yes; but Mademoiselle Denise is as innocent as an angel," broke in M. Folgat eagerly, "and she loves M. de Boiscoran. Why should we trouble her purity and happiness? Is she not unhappy enough? M. de Boiscoran is no longer kept in close confinement. He will see his betrothed, and, if he thinks proper, he can tell her. He alone has the right to do so. I shall, however, dissuade him. From what I know of Mademoiselle de Chandore's character, it would be impossible for her to control herself, if she should meet the Countess de Claudieuse."

"M. de Chandore ought not to say anything," observed M. Magloire decisively. "It is too much, already, to have to intrust the marchioness with the secret; for you must not forget, gentlemen, that the slightest indiscretion would certainly ruin all M. Folgat's delicate plans."

Thereupon they all left the room, with the exception of M. de Chandore, who mused to himself,—“Yes, they are right; but what am I to say?” He was thinking the matter over almost painfully, when a maid came to tell him that Denise wished to see him. He followed the girl with hesitating steps, trying to compose his features so as to efface all traces of the emotion through which he had just passed. The two aunts had taken Denise and the marchioness to a room on the upper floor. Here M. de Chandore found them all assembled,—the marchioness, pale and overcome, extended in an easy-chair; Denise walking up and down with burning cheeks and blazing eyes. As soon as he entered, she asked him in a sharp, sad voice,—“Well, there is no hope, I suppose?”

“More hope than ever, on the contrary,” he replied, trying to smile.

“Then why did M. Magloire send us all out of the room?”

The old gentleman had had time to prepare a fib. “Because M. Magloire had a piece of bad news to communicate. There is no chance of a true bill not being found. Jacques will have to appear in court.”

The marchioness sprung up like a piece of mechanism. “What! Jacques before the assizes?” she cried. “My son! A Boiscoran!” And so saying she fell back into her chair.

Not a muscle in Denise's face had moved, but it was in a strange tone of voice that she remarked,—“I was prepared for something worse. It is possible to avoid the court.”

With these words she left the room, shutting the door so violently, that both the Demoiselles de Lavarande hastened after her. M. de Chandore thought he might now speak freely. He went towards the marchioness, and gave vent to that pent up wrath which had been rising within him for some time past. “Your son,” he cried, “your Jacques, I wish he were dead a thousand times! The wretch killing my child; you see he is killing her”

And, without pity, he told her the whole story of Jacques's connection with the Countess de Claudieuse. The marchioness was overcome. She even ceased to sob, and had not strength enough left to ask him to have pity on her, but whom he had finished, she murmured to herself with an expression of unspeakable suffering,—“My God! what a punishment!”

XVI.

ON leaving the Baron de Chandore's house, M. Folgat and M. Magloire went at once to the offices of the public prosecutor to examine the various papers relating to the case, permission to do so having been granted by M. Galpin-Daveline. On their arrival they immediately began to search for any documents concerning Cocoleu, but to their surprise they found none. There was not a trace of the idiot's statement on the night of the fire, of the efforts since made to obtain from him the confirmation of his original evidence, or of the experts' reports. Evidently M. Galpin-Daveline had thought fit to drop Cocoleu altogether. Of course he had a right to do so; for the prosecution need only call the witnesses it considers useful, having the right to ignore all the others. “Ah, that investigating magistrate's a clever fellow,” growled M. Magloire, as he glanced at the various documents. And, in truth, it was really very well managed. By this step M. Galpin deprived the defence of a most valuable instrument, and of a sure means of provoking an incident at the trial, by which the jury might be influenced in the prisoner's favour; for although the defence itself might summon the supposed idiot before the court, yet in that case the effect would no longer be the same. If Cocoleu appeared for M. Galpin, as a witness for the prosecution, the defence could exclaim with indignation,—“What! You accuse the prisoner upon such a creature's testimony?” But, if he had to be summoned by the defence, as prisoner's evidence, that is to say as one of those witnesses whom the jury always suspect, then the prosecution in its turn would be able to exclaim,—“What do you hope for from a poor idiot, whose mental condition is such, that we refused his evidence when it might have been most useful? The entire character of the case appears to be changed,” murmured M. Folgat. “But then how can M. Galpin prove Jacques de Boiscoran's guilt?”

Oh! in the simplest possible manner. He would start with the fact that the Count de Claudieuse was able to give the precise hour at which the crime was committed. Thence he would pass on immediately to the evidence of young Ribot, who met M. de Boiscoran crossing the marshes, on his way to Valpinson, before the crime; next to that of Gaudry, who had seen him come back from Valpinson through the woods, after the conflagration. Three others witnesses who had turned up during the investigation would confirm this evidence; and, by these means alone, and by comparing the hours, M. Galpin would succeed in proving, almost beyond doubt, that the accused had gone to Valpinson, and nowhere else, and that he had been there at the time the crime was committed. What was he doing there? To this question the prosecution would reply by the evidence taken on the first day of the inquiry, by the water in which Jacques washed his hands, the cartridge-case found near the house, and the identity of the shot extracted from the count's wounds with those seized with the gun at Boiscoran. Everything would be plain, precise, and formidable, admitting of no discussion, no doubt, no suggestion. It would look like a mathematical deduction.

"Whether he be innocent or guilty," said M. Magloire to his young colleague, "Jacques is lost if we cannot get hold of some evidence against the Countess de Claudieuse. And even if it should be established that she is guilty, Jacques will always be looked upon as her accomplice."

Nevertheless, they spent a part of the night in going over all the papers carefully, and in studying every point made by the prosecution. Next morning, about nine o'clock, having had only a few hours sleep, they went together to the prison.

The night before, the jailer had said to his wife, at supper,—“I am tired of the life I am leading here. They have paid me for my place, haven't they? Well, I mean to go.”

“You are a fool!” his wife had replied. “As long as M. de Boiscoran is a prisoner, there is a chance of profit. You don't know how rich those Chandores are. You ought to stay.”

Like many other husbands, Blangin fancied he was master in his own house. He remonstrated. He swore

enough to make the ceiling fall down upon him. He even appealed to the strength of his arm, and yet, notwithstanding all this, Madame Blangin having decided that he should stay, he did stay. Sitting in front of the jail, and absorbed in the most dismal thoughts, he was smoking his pipe, when M. Magloire and M. Folgat appeared at the prison gate, and handed him M. Galpin's order for admission. He rose as they approached, for he was afraid of them, not knowing whether they were in Denise's secret or not. He therefore politely doffed his worsted cap, took his pipe from his mouth, and said, "Ah! You come to see M. de Boiscoran, gentlemen? I will show you in: just give me time to go for my keys."

M. Magloire held him back. "First of all," he said, "how is M. de Boiscoran?"

"Only so-so," replied the jailer.

"What is the matter?"

"Why what is the matter with all the prisoners when they see that things are likely to turn out badly for them?"

The two lawyers looked at each others sadly. It was clear that Blangin thought Jacques guilty, and that was a bad omen. Those who guard prisoners have generally a keen scent; and not unfrequently lawyers consult them, very much as an author consults the actors of the theatre at which his piece is to appear. "Has he told you anything?" asked M. Folgat.

"Personally, I have heard nothing," replied the jailer. And, shaking his head, he added,— "But you know we have our experience. After a prisoner has been with his counsel, I generally go to see him, to offer him something,—some little trifle to set him right again. So, yesterday, after M. Magloire had been here, I went to M. de Boiscoran's cell and found him in a pitiful condition. He was lying on his bed, his head on the pillow, as stiff as a corpse. It was some time before he heard me. I shook my keys, I stamped and coughed. No use. As I was growing frightened, I went up to him, and took him by the shoulder. 'Eh, sir!' said I. Good heavens! he sprang up as if shot, and exclaimed, 'What do you want?' Of course. I tried to console him, to explain to him that he ought to speak out; that it is rather unpleasant to appear in court, but that people don't die of it; that they even come out of it as white as snow, if they have a good advocate. But I might

just as well have been singing. The more I talked, the fiercer he looked, and at last he cried, without letting me finish, 'Get out, get out! Leave me!'"

Blangin paused a moment to take a whiff at his pipe; but it had gone out: accordingly he put it in his pocket, and then continued,—“I might have told him that I had a right to come into the cells whenever I liked, and to stay there as long as it pleases me. But prisoners are like children: you must not worry them. Still I opened the wicket of the door and remained outside watching him. Ah, gentlemen, I have been here twenty years, and I have seen many despairing men; but I never saw any despair like this young man's. He had jumped up as soon as I turned my back, and was walking up and down, sobbing aloud. He looked as pale as death; and big tears were running down his cheeks.

M. Magloire felt pained at listening to each one of these details. His opinion had not materially changed since the day before; but he had had time to reflect and to reproach himself for his harshness.

“I was at my post for an hour at least,” continued the jailer, “when all of a sudden M. de Boiscoran throws himself against the door, and begins to knock at it with his feet, and to call as loud as he can. I keep him waiting a little while, so that he should not know I was so near by, and then I open, pretending to have hurried up ever so fast. As soon as I show myself he says, ‘I have the right to receive visitors, haven't I? And nobody has been to see me?’—‘No one.’—‘Are you sure?’—‘Quite sure.’ I thought I had killed him. He put his hands to his forehead like this; and then he said, ‘No one!—no mother, no betrothed, no friend! Well, it is all over! I am no longer in existence. I am forgotten, abandoned, disowned.’ He said this in a voice that would have drawn tears from a stone; whereupon I suggested to him to write a letter, which I would send to M. de Chandore. But he at once became furious again, and cried, ‘No, never! go away! There is nothing left for me but death.’”

M. Folgat had not uttered a word; but his pallor betrayed his emotion.

“You will understand, gentlemen,” continued Blangin, that I did not feel quite satisfied. The cell in which M. de Boiscoran is staying has a bad reputation. Since I have

been at Sauveterre, one man has killed himself in it, and another has tried to commit suicide. So I called Frumence Cheminot, a poor vagrant who assists me in the jail; and we arranged that one of us would always be on guard, never losing sight of the prisoner for a moment. But it was a useless precaution. At night, when M. de Boiscoran's supper was brought him, he was perfectly calm again; and he even said he would try to eat something to keep up his strength. Poor fellow! If he has no other strength than what his meal gave him, he won't go far. He had not swallowed four mouthfuls, when he almost choked; and at one time Frumence and I thought he would die in our hands; I almost thought it might be fortunate. However, at about nine o'clock he got a little better, and remained all night long sitting by the window."

M. Magloire could stand it no longer. "Let us go up," he said to his colleague.

They entered, and as they reached the passage conducting to Jacques's cell, they noticed Frumence, who made them a sign to step lightly. "What is the matter?" they asked in an undertone.

"I believe he is asleep," replied the vagrant. "Poor fellow! Who knows but what he dreams he is free, at home in his chateau?"

M. Folgat walked on tiptoe towards the door, but Jacques was already awake, the noise of the footsteps and the voices having disturbed his agitated slumber. Blangin opened, and at once M. Magloire stepped forward and speaking to the prisoner, exclaimed, "I bring you reinforcements,—M. Folgat, my colleague, who has come down from Paris with your mother."

Coolly, and without saying a word, M. de Boiscoran bowed.

"I see you are angry with me," continued M. Magloire. "I was too quick yesterday, much too quick."

Jacques shook his head, and in an icy tone replied, "I on my side was angry; but I have reflected since, and now I thank you for your candour. At least, I know my fate: Innocent though I be, if I go into court, I shall be condemned as an incendiary and a murderer. I prefer not going into court at all."

"My poor fellow! all hope is not lost."

"Yes, it is. Who would believe me, if you, my friend, cannot believe me?"

"I would," said M. Folgat promptly. "I, who, without knowing you, have from the beginning believed in your innocence,—I who, now that I have seen you, adhere to my conviction."

Quicker than thought, M. de Boiscoran seized the young advocate's hand, and, pressing it convulsively,—*"Thanks, oh, thanks for that word alone!"* he cried, *"I thank you, sir, for the faith you have in me!"*

This was the first time, since his arrest, that the unfortunate fellow felt a ray of hope. Alas! it died away in a second. His eyes became dim again; a cloud re-settled on his brow and he said in a hoarse voice—*"Unfortunately, nothing can be done for me now. No doubt M. Magloire has told you my sad history and my statement. I have no proof; or, at least, to furnish proof, I should have to enter into details which the court would refuse to admit; or, if by a miracle they were admitted, I should be ruined for ever by them. There are confidences which can not be spoken of, secrets which can not be revealed, veils which must not be lifted. It is better to be condemned innocent than to be acquitted infamous and dishonoured. Gentlemen, I decline being defended."*

What was his desperate purpose that he should have come to such a decision? His counsel trembled, thinking they guessed it. *"You have no right to give yourself up,"* said M. Folgat.

"Why not?"

"Because you are not alone in your trouble, sir. Because you have relations, friends, and—"

A bitter ironical smile crossed Jacques de Boiscoran's lips, as he rejoined, *"What do I owe them, if they have not even the courage to wait until sentence is pronounced before they condemn me? Their merciless verdict has actually anticipated that of the jury. It is to an unknown person, to you, M. Folgat, that I am indebted for the first expression of sympathy."*

"Ah, that is not so," exclaimed M. Magloire, *"you know very well."*

But Jacques seemed not to hear him. *"Friends!"* he went on. *"Oh yes! I had friends in my days of prosperity. There was M. Galpin Daveline and M. Daubigeon: they were my friends. One has become my judge, the most cruel and pitiless of judges; and the other, who is public*

prosecutor, has not even made an effort to come to my assistance. M. Magloire also used to be a friend of mine, and told me a hundred times that I could count upon him as I counted upon myself, and that was my reason in choosing him as my counsel; yet, when I endeavoured to convince him of my innocence, he told me I lied!"

Once more the eminent advocate of Sauveterre tried to protest; but it was in vain.

"Relations!" continued Jacques in a voice trembling with indignation,—*"oh, yes! I have relations, a father and a mother. Where are they when their son, victimised by unheard-of fatality, is struggling in the meshes of a most odious and infamous plot? My father stays quietly in Paris, devoted to his pursuits and usual pleasures. My mother has come down to Sauveterre. She is here now; and she has been told that I am at liberty to receive visitors; but in vain! I was hoping for her yesterday; but the wretch who is accused of a crime is no longer her son! She never came. No one came. Henceforth I stand alone in the world; and now you see why I have a right to dispose of myself."*

M. Folgat did not think for a moment of discussing the point. It would have been useless. Despair never reasons. He merely observed, *"You forget Mademoiselle de Chandore, sir."*

Jacques turned crimson, and murmured, trembling in all his limbs, *"Denise!"*

"Yes, Denise," said the young advocate. *"You forget her courage, her devotion, and all she has done for you. Can you say that she abandons you,—she who set aside all her maidenly reserve and timidity for your sake, she who came and spent a whole night in this prison! She was risking nothing less than her maiden honour; for she might have been discovered or betrayed. She knew it very well, and yet she did not hesitate."*

"Ah! you are cruel, sir," broke in Jacques. And, pressing the lawyer's arm, he added, *"And do you not understand that her memory kills me, and that my misery is all the greater, as I know but too well what bliss I am losing? Do you not see that I love Denise as woman never was loved before? Ah, if my life alone were at stake! I, at least, I have to make amends for a great wrong; but she—Great God, why did I ever cross her*

path?" He remained for a moment buried in thought; then he continued once more, "And yet she, too, did not come yesterday. Why? Oh! no doubt they have told her all. They have told her how I came to be at Valpinson the night of the crime."

"You are mistaken, Jacques," said M. Magloire. "Mademoiselle de Chandore knows nothing."

"Is it possible?"

"M. Magloire did not speak in her presence," added M. Folgat; "and we have bound M. de Chandore to secrecy. I insisted that you alone had the right to tell the truth to Mademoiselle Denise."

"Then how does she explain to herself that I am not set free?"

"She cannot explain it."

"My God! she does not think me guilty also?"

"If you were to tell her so yourself, she would not believe you."

"And yet she never came here yesterday."

"She could not. Although they told her nothing your mother had to be told. The marchioness was literally thunderstruck. She remained for more than an hour unconscious in Mademoiselle Denise's arms. When she recovered her senses, her first words were for you; but it was then too late to be admitted here."

In mentioning Mademoiselle de Chandore's name M. Folgat had found the surest, and perhaps the only means of turning Jacques from his desperate purpose. "How can I ever sufficiently thank you, sir?" asked the prisoner.

"By promising me that you will for ever abandon the fatal resolve you had formed," replied the young advocate. "If you were guilty, I should be the first to say, 'Be it so!' and I would supply you with the means you wish for. Suicide would be an expiation. But as you are innocent, you have no right to kill yourself: suicide would be a confession."

"What am I to do?"

"Defend yourself. Fight."

"Without hope?"

"Yes, even without hope. When you faced the Prussians, did you ever think of blowing out your brains? No! And yet you knew that they were superior in numbers, and would conquer, in all probability. Well, you are once

more in face of the enemy ; and even if you were certain of defeat, that is to say, of condemnation, I should still say, 'Fight.' If you were condemned, and had to mount the scaffold within twenty-four hours, I should still say 'Fight.' You must live on ; for until the last hour has arrived something may happen which will enable us to discover the guilty one. And, if no such event should happen, I should nevertheless repeat, 'You must wait for the executioner in order to protest from the scaffold against judicial murder, and affirm your innocence once more.'

While M. Folgat was speaking Jacques had recovered his bearing. "Upon my honour, sir," he now said, "I promise you I will hold out to the bitter end. Still let me ask you what is to be done ?"

"First of all," replied M. Folgat, "I mean to recommence, for our benefit, the investigation which M. Galpin leaves incomplete. To-night your mother and I will start for Paris. I have come to ask you for the necessary information, and the means to explore your house in the Rue des Vignes, to discover the friend whose name you assumed, and the servant who waited upon you."

The bolts were drawn as he said this ; and Blangin's rubicund face appeared at the open wicket. "The Marchioness de Boiscoran," he said, "is in the parlour, and begs you will come down as soon as you have done with these gentlemen."

Jacques had turned very pale. "My mother," he murmured. Then he added, speaking to the jailer,—“Do not go yet.—We have nearly done.” His agitation was so great he could not master it. "We must stop here for to-day," he said to the two lawyers. "I cannot think now."

But M. Folgat had declared he would leave for Paris that very night ; and he was determined to do so. He therefore exclaimed, "Our success depends on the rapidity of our movements. I beg you will let me insist upon your giving me at once the few items of information which I need for my purpose."

Jacques shook his head sadly. "The task is beyond your power, sir," he began.

"Nevertheless, do what my colleague asks you," urged M. Magloire : and then, without any further opposition, and (who knows ?) perhaps with a secret hope which he would not confess to himself, Jacques gave the young advocate

the most minute details concerning his relations with the Countess de Claudieuse. He told him at what hour she used to come to the house, what road she took, and how she was usually dressed. The keys of the house were at Boiscoran, in a drawer which Jacques described. M. Folgat would only have to ask Anthony for them. Then the prisoner mentioned how they might find out what had become of the Englishman whose name he had borrowed. Sir Francis Burnett had a brother in London. Jacques did not know his precise address; but he knew he had important business relations with India, and had, once upon a time, been connected with the celebrated firm of Gilmour and Benson. As for the English servant-girl who attended to his house in the Rue des Vignes, Jacques had taken her on the recommendation of a neighbouring agency; and he had had nothing to do with her, except to pay her her wages, and occasionally give her some gratuity besides. All he could say, was, that the girl's name was Suky Wood; that she was a native of Folkstone, where her parents kept a sailors' tavern; and that, before coming to France, she had been a chambermaid at the Adelphi hotel in Liverpool.

M. Folgat carefully noted down this information, observing. "This is more than enough to begin the campaign. Now you must give me the names and addresses of your tradesmen in Passy."

"You will find a list in a small pocket-book which is in the same drawer with the keys," replied Jacques. "There also are the deeds and other papers concerning the house. Finally, you might take Anthony with you: he is devoted to me."

"I shall certainly take him, if you will allow me," replied the lawyer. Then, gathering up his notes, he added,—"I shall not be absent more than three or four days; as soon as I return, we will prepare our plan of defence. Till then, my dear client, keep up your courage."

They called Blangin to open the door for them; and then, having shaken hands with Jacques de Boiscoran, M. Folgat and M. Magloire went away.

"Well, are we going to the parlour now?" added the jailer.

Jacques made no reply. He had most ardently longed for his mother's visit; and now, when he was about to see

her, he felt assailed by all kinds of vague and gloomy apprehensions. The last time he had kissed her was in Paris, in their family mansion. He had left her, his heart swelling with hope and joy, to go to Denise; and his mother, as he remembered distinctly, had said to him, "I shall not see you again till the day before the wedding." And in lieu thereof she was to see him again in a jail-parlour, accused of an abominable crime. And perhaps she was doubtful of his innocence.

"Sir, the marchioness is waiting for you," said the jailer once more.

Jacques trembled. "I am ready," he replied; "let us go!" And, descending the stairs, he tried his best to compose his features, and to arm himself with courage and calmness. "For," said he, "she must not learn how horrible my position is."

At the foot of the steps, Blangin pointed to a door, and exclaimed. "There's the parlour. When the marchioness wants to go, please call me."

On the threshold, Jacques paused once more. The parlour of the Sauveterre jail is an immense vaulted hall, lighted by two narrow windows with heavy iron gratings. There is no furniture save a coarse bench fastened to the damp, discoloured wall; and on this bench, in the full sunlight sat, or rather lay, apparently bereft of all strength, the Marchioness de Boiscoran. When Jacques saw her, he could hardly suppress a cry of horror and grief. Was that really his mother,—that thin old lady with the sallow complexion, red eyes, and trembling hands? "O God, O God!" he murmured.

She heard him, for she raised her head; and when she recognised him she wished to rise; but her strength forsook her, and she sunk back upon the bench, crying—"O Jacques, my son!"

She, also, was terrified when she saw how two months of anguish and sleeplessness had changed Jacques. He was kneeling at her feet upon the unclean pavement, and, in a barely intelligible voice, he exclaimed, "Can you pardon me the great grief I cause you?"

She looked at him for a moment with a bewildered air; and then, all of a sudden took his head in her two hands, kissed him with passionate vehemence, and replied, "Will I pardon you? Alas, what have I to pardon? If you

were guilty, I should love you still ; and you are innocent."

Jacques breathed more freely. By the tone of his mother's voice he felt that she, at least, was sure of him. "And my father?" he asked.

There was a faint blush on the marchioness's pale cheeks. "I shall see him to-morrow," she replied ; "for I leave to-night with M. Folgat."

"What ! In this state of weakness !"

"I must."

"Could not my father leave his collections for a few days ? Why did he not come down ? Does he think I am guilty ?"

"No ; it is just because he is so sure of your innocence, that he remains in Paris. He does not believe you are in danger. He insists that justice cannot err."

"I hope not," replied Jacques with a forced smile. Then, changing his tone, he added, "And Denise ? Why did she not come with you ?"

"Because I would not have it. She knows nothing. It has been agreed upon that the name of the Countess de Claudieuse is not to be mentioned in her presence ; and I wanted to speak to you about that abominable woman. Jacques, my poor child, where has that unlucky passion brought you ?" He made no reply. "Did you love her ?" asked the marchioness again.

"I thought I did."

"And she ?"

"Oh, she ! God alone knows the secret of her strange heart."

"There is nothing to hope from her, then, no pity, no remorse ?"

"Nothing. I have given her up. She has had her revenge. She had forewarned me."

The marchioness sighed. "I thought so," she said. "Last Sunday, when I knew nothing about this, I happened to be close to her at church, and unconsciously admired her profound devotion, the purity of her looks, and her calm nobility of manner. Yesterday, when I heard the truth I shuddered. I felt how formidable the woman must be who can affect such calmness when her lover is in prison, accused of the very crime which she has committed."

"Nothing in the world would trouble her, mother."

"Still she ought to tremble; for she must know that you have told us everything. How can we unmask her?"

But time was passing; and Blangin came to tell the marchioness that she must withdraw. She therefore went away after having kissed her son once more, and that same evening, according to their arrangement, she left for Paris, accompanied by M. Folgat and old Anthony.

XVII.

EVERY one at Sauveterre,—M. de Chandore, like Jacques himself—blamed the Marquis de Boiscoran for remaining in Paris. If he did so, however, it was certainly not from indifference; for he was dying with anxiety. He had shut himself up in the family mansion, and refused to see any one. His oldest friends, even the usually welcome dealers in curiosities, were refused admittance to the house. He never went out; the dust accumulated among his collections; and nothing could arouse him from his prostration, except a letter from Sauveterre. Every morning he received one or more,—from the marchioness or M. Folgat, from M. Seneschal or M. Magloire, from M. de Chandore, Denise, or perhaps Dr. Seignebois. Thus he could follow at a distance all the phases of the proceedings. Despite the news that reached him, however, despite the appeals made to him, there was still one thing he would not do: he would not go to Sauveterre. Once only when he received, through Denise's agency, a letter from Jacques himself, did he order his servant to get his trunks ready for the same evening. But at the last moment he gave counter-orders, saying that on reconsideration he would not leave.

"There is something extraordinary going on in the marquis's mind," said the servants to each other. The fact is, he spent his days, and a part of his nights, in his study, half-buried in an arm-chair, eating little, and sleeping still less, insensible to all that went on around him. On his table he had arranged all his letters from Sauveterre; and he read and re-read them incessantly, phrase by phrase, trying, ever in vain, to disengage the truth from a mass of conflicting statements. He was no longer as sure of his son as he had been at first, far from

it! Each day had brought him a new doubt; every letter, additional uncertainty. Hence he was all the time a prey to the most harassing apprehensions. He would have banished them from his mind; but ever and ever they returned, stronger and more irresistible than before, like the waves of the rising tide.

He was in this state of mind one morning in his study. It was still early, and he was suffering acutely from anxiety, for M. Folgat had written, "To-morrow all uncertainty will end. To-morrow the solitary confinement will cease, and M. Jacques will see M. Magloire, the counsel he has chosen. We will write immediately." It was for the news this promised letter might bring that the marquis was now waiting. Twice already he had rung to inquire if the post had not come, when all of a sudden his valet entered the room, and with a frightened air exclaimed: "The marchioness has just arrived with Anthony, M. Jacques's own man."

Hardly were these words spoken than Madame de Bois-coran herself entered, looking even worse than when Jacques saw her in the prison parlour; for she was overcome by the fatigue of a night spent in travelling. The marquis started to his feet, and as soon as the servant had left the room, he asked in a trembling voice, as if wishing for an answer, and still fearing to hear it, "Has anything unusual happened?"

"Yes."

"Good or bad?"

"Sad."

"Good heavens! Jacques has not confessed?"

"How could he confess when he is innocent?"

"Then he has explained?"

"As far as I am concerned, and M. Folgat, Dr. Seignebos, and all those who know him and love him, yes, but not for the public, his enemies, or the law. He has explained everything; but he has no proofs."

The marquis's mournful features settled into still deeper gloom. "In other words, he has to be believed on his word?" he asked.

"Don't you believe him?"

"My opinion is not in question, we have to think of the jury."

"Well, for the jury proof will be found; at least such is

the hope of M. Folgat, who has come in the same train with me, and whom you will see to-day."

"What proof will he find?"

Perhaps the marchioness was not unprepared for such a reception; still she was evidently disconcerted. "Jacques," she began, "was the Countess de Claudieuse's lover."

"Ah, ah!" broke in the marquis. And, in a tone of offensive irony, he added, "What, another story of equivocal intercourse, eh?"

The marchioness did not answer, but quietly proceeded: "When the countess heard of Jacques's intended marriage, she became exasperated, and determined to be avenged."

"And, in order to be avenged, she tried to murder her husband, eh?"

"She wished to be free."

The Marquis de Boiscoran interrupted his wife with a formidable oath. "And that is all Jacques could invent!" he cried. "If he kept so obstinately silent it was to finish by telling us this improbable story."

"You don't let me conclude. Our son is the victim of unparalleled coincidences."

"Of course! Unparalleled coincidences! That is what every one of the the thousand or two thousand rascals, sentenced every year, say. Do you think they confess? Not they! Ask them, and they will prove to you that they are victims of fate, of some dark plot, or finally, of an error of judgment. As if justice could err in these days of ours, after all these preliminary examinations, long inquiries, careful investigations."

"You will see M. Folgat. He will tell you what hope there is."

"And if all hope fails?" and seeing that the marchioness hung her head, "What then?" asked her husband.

"All would still not be lost. But then we should have to endure the pain of seeing our son in the dock."

The old gentleman's tall figure rose once more to its full height; his face grew red; and wrath flashed from his eyes. "Jacques in the dock!" he cried with a formidable voice. "And you come and tell me that coolly, as if it were a simple natural matter! And what will happen then, if he is in the dock? He will be condemned; and a Boiscoran will go to the galleys. But no, that cannot be! I do not say that a Boiscoran may not commit a crime, passion makes us

do strange things; but a Boiscoran, when he regains his senses, knows what he should do. Blood washes out all stains. Jacques prefers the executioner; he waits; he is cunning; he means to plead. If he but save his head, he is quite content. A few years hard labour, I suppose, will be a trifle to him. And to think that coward should be a Boiscoran; that my blood should flow in his veins! Come, come, madame, Jacques is no son of mine."

Crushed as the marchioness had seemed to be till now, she rose under this atrocious insult. "Sir!" she cried.

But M. de Boiscoran was not in a state to listen to her. "I know what I am saying," he went on. "I remember everything, if you have forgotten. Come, let us go back to the past. Remember the time when Jacques was born, and tell me in what year it was that M. de Margeril refused my challenge."

Indignation restored the marchioness's strength. "And you tell me this to-day," she cried, "after thirty years, and under such circumstances!"

"Yes, after thirty years. Eternity might pass over these recollections, and it would not efface them. Still, but for these circumstances to which you refer, I should never have said anything. At the time to which I allude, I had to choose between two evils—either to be ridiculous, or hated. I preferred to keep silent, and not to inquire too far. My happiness was gone; but I wished to save my peace of mind. We have lived together on excellent terms; but there has always been between us the high wall of suspicion. As long as I was doubtful, I kept silent. But now, when the facts confirm my doubts, I say again, 'Jacques is no son of mine!'"

The Marchioness de Boiscoran wrung her hands, overcome with grief, shame, and indignation. "What a humiliation!" she exclaimed. "What you are saying is too horrible. It is unworthy of you to add this terrible suffering to the martyrdom which I am enduring."

M. de Boiscoran laughed convulsively. "Did I bring about this catastrophe?" he asked.

"Well, then, yes! One day I was imprudent and indiscreet. I was young: I knew nothing of life; the world worshipped me; and you, my husband, my guide, gave yourself up to your ambition, and left me to myself. I could not foresee the consequences of a very inoffensive piece of coquetry."

"Then you see those consequences now. After thirty years I disown the child that bears my name ; and I say, that, if he is innocent, he suffers for his mother's sins. Fate would have it that your son should covet his neighbour's wife, and, having taken her, it is but justice that he should die the death of the adulterer."

"But you know very well that I have never forgotten my duty."

"I know nothing."

"You have acknowledged it, because you refused to hear the explanation which would have justified me."

"True, I did shrink from an explanation, which, with your unbearable pride, would necessarily have led to a rupture, and thus to a fearful scandal."

The marchioness might have told her husband, that, by refusing to hear her explanation, he had forfeited all right to utter a reproach ; but she felt it would be useless.

"All I do know is," continued the marquis, "that there is somewhere in this world a man whom I wanted to kill. Gossiping people betrayed his name to me. I went to him, and demanded satisfaction, saying, that I hoped he would conceal the real reason for our encounter even from our seconds. He refused to give me satisfaction, on the ground that he did not owe me any, that you have been calumniated, and that he would only meet me if I should insult him publicly."

"Well ?"

"What could I do after that ? Investigate the matter ? You had no doubt taken your precautions, and it would have amounted to nothing. Watch you ? I should only have demeaned myself uselessly ; for you were no doubt on your guard. Should I ask for a separation ? The law afforded me that remedy. I might have dragged you into court, held you up to the sarcasms of my counsel, and exposed you to the jests of your own. I had a right to humble you, to dishonour my name, to proclaim your disgrace, to publish it in the newspapers. Ah, I would sooner have died !"

The marchioness seemed to be puzzled. "That is the explanation of your conduct ?" she asked.

"Yes, that was my reason for giving up public life, ambitious as I was. That was the reason why I withdrew from the world ; for I thought everybody smiled as I

passed. That is why I gave you the management of our house and education of your son, why I became a passionate collector, a half-mad original. And you only find out to-day that you have ruined my life?"

There was more compassion than resentment in the manner in which the marchioness looked at her husband. "You mentioned to me your unjust suspicions," she replied; "but I felt strong in my innocence, and I was in hope that time and my conduct would efface them."

"Faith once lost never comes back again."

"The fearful idea that you could doubt of your paternity had never even occurred to me."

The marquis shook his head. "Still it was so," he replied. "I have suffered terribly. I loved Jacques. Yes, in spite of all, in spite of myself, I loved him. Had he not all the qualities which are a father's pride and joy? Was he not generous and noble-hearted, open to all lofty sentiments, affectionate, and always anxious to please me? I never had to complain of him. And even lately, during that abominable war, did he not show his courage, and valiantly earn the cross they gave him? At all times, and from all sides, I have been congratulated on his account. People have praised his talents and his assiduity. Alas! at the very moment when they told me what a happy father I was, I was the most wretched of men. How many times would I not have drawn him to my heart had not that horrible doubt risen within me—'if he should not be my son.' And then I pushed him back, and looked in his face for a trace of another man's features."

By the time the marquis had finished speaking his wrath had cooled down, perhaps by reason of its excess. He felt a certain tenderness in his heart, and sinking into his chair, and hiding his face in his hands, he murmured,—“If he should be my son, however; if he should be innocent! Ah, this doubt is intolerable! And I who would not move from here,—I who have done nothing for him,—I might have done everything at first. It would have been easy for me to obtain a change of venue to free him from this Galpin-Daveline, formerly his friend, and now his enemy."

M. de Boiscoran was right when he said his wife's pride was unmanageable. And yet, cruelly wounded as she was, she suppressed her pride, and, thinking only of her son,

remained quite humble. Drawing from her bosom the letter which Jacques had sent to her the day before she left Sauveterre, she handed it to her husband, saying,—“Will you read what our son says?”

The marquis's hand trembled as he took the letter. After a short pause he opened it and read. “Do you forsake me too, father, when everybody forsakes me? And yet I have never needed your love as much as now. The peril is imminent. Everything is against me. Never has such a combination of fatal circumstances been seen before. I may not be able to prove my innocence; but you,—you surely cannot think your son guilty of such a monstrous and heinous crime? Oh, no! surely not. My mind is made up. I shall struggle to the bitter end. To my last breath I shall defend, not my life, but my honour. Ah, if you but knew! But there are things which cannot be written, and which only a father can be told. I beseech you come to me, let me see you, let me hold your hand in mine. Do not refuse this last and greatest comfort to your unhappy son.”

The marquis started up. “Oh, yes, very unhappy indeed!” he said. And, bowing to his wife, he added,—“I interrupted you. Now, pray tell me all.”

Maternal love conquered womanly resentment. Without a shadow of hesitation, and as if nothing had taken place, and marchioness gave her husband a full account of Jacques's statement just as it was made to M. Magloire.

The marquis seemed amazed. “That is unheard of!” he said. And, when his wife had finished, he added,—“Then that was the reason why Jacques was so very angry when you spoke of inviting the Countess de Claudieuse, and why he told you, that, if he saw her enter at one door, he would walk out of the other. We did not understand his aversion.”

“Alas! it was not aversion. Jacques only obeyed at that time the countess's cunning lessons.”

In less than a minute the most contradictory resolutions seemed to flit across the marquis's countenance. He evidently hesitated, but at last he said,—“Whatever can be done to make up for the past inaction, shall now be done. I will go to Sauveterre. Jacques must be saved. M. de Margeril is all-powerful. Go to him. I permit it. I beg you will do so.”

The eyes of the marchioness filled with tears, hot tears, the first she had shed since the beginning of this scene. "Do you not see," she asked, "that what you wished me to do is now impossible? Anything, yes, anything in the world but that. But Jacques and I—we are innocent. God will have pity on us. M. Folgat will save us."

XVIII.

M. FOLGAT was already at work. He had confidence in his cause, a firm conviction of his client's innocence, a desire to solve the mystery, a love of contention, and an intense thirst for success: all reasons to stimulate his activity. And, above all this, Denise had inspired him with a mysterious and indefinable sentiment. Indeed he had succumbed to her charms, like everybody else. It was not love, for love means hope; and he knew perfectly well that Denise belonged to Jacques for ever. It was a sweet and all-powerful sentiment, which had seized hold of him and made him wish to devote himself to her, and to count for something to her life and happiness. It was for her sake that he had sacrificed all his business, and forgotten his clients, in order to stay at Sauveterre. It was for her sake, above all, that he wished to save Jacques.

He had no sooner arrived at the Paris terminus, and left the Marchioness de Boiscoran in old Anthony's care, than he jumped into a cab, and had himself driven to his house, where, having sent a telegram the day before, his servant was ready waiting for him. He made a hasty toilette and then returned to his vehicle, being determined to start at once in search of the man, who, he thought, was most likely to be able to fathom the mystery. This was an individual named Goudar, who was connected with the police department in some capacity or other, and who enjoyed an income large enough to render him very comfortable. He was one of those agents whom the authorities employ for specially delicate tasks—such as require great tact and keen scent, an intrepidity beyond all doubt, and imperturbable self-possession. M. Folgat had had opportunities of knowing and appreciating Goudar in connection with the famous case of the Mutual Discount Society,

when he was instructed to track the cashier who had fled, leaving a deficit of several millions. Goudar had caught him in Canada, after pursuing him for three months all over America; but, on the day of his arrest, the cashier had only some forty thousand francs with him. What had become of the millions? When he was questioned, he said he had spent them. He had gambled in stocks, he had been unfortunate, &c.; and everybody believed him, excepting Goudar. Stimulated by the promise of a magnificent reward, the latter began his campaign once more; and, in less than six weeks, he had secured sixteen hundred thousand francs which the cashier had deposited in London with a woman of doubtful character.

The story is well known, though the general public has always remained ignorant of the genius, and fertility of resources and expedients, which Goudar displayed in obtaining such a success. M. Folgat, however, was fully aware of the detective's merit; for he had been the counsel of the stockholders of the Mutual Discount Society: and he had always thought, that, if ever the opportunity offered, he would employ this marvellously skilful man.

Goudar, who was married, and had a child, lived out of the world, on the road to Versailles, not far from the fortifications. He occupied with his family a small house of his own,—a veritable philosopher's home, with a little garden in front, and a large one behind, in which latter he raised vegetables and fruit, and bred all kinds of animals. For it is a remarkable fact that police agents who constantly have to rake among the dung-heaps of society, love the country, and, no doubt disgusted with man, are passionately fond of flowers and animals.

When M. Folgat stepped out of the vehicle he had hired, in front of this pleasant home, a graceful young woman of twenty-five, with a fresh healthy face, was playing in the front-garden with a pretty little girl some three or four years old. "M. Goudar, madam?" asked M. Folgat raising his hat.

The young woman blushed slightly, and answered modestly, but without embarrassment, and in a most pleasing voice.—"My husband is in the garden behind, you will easily find him, if you will walk down this path to the back of the house."

The young advocate followed the direction, and soon

saw his man at a distance with an old straw hat on his head, slippers on his feet, and a huge blue apron fastened behind him. Goudar was perched half way up a ladder busily engaged in slipping horse hair bags over a number of magnificent branches of chasselas grapes, hanging from a trellis running along the wall. Hearing the gravel grate under the footsteps of the new-comer, he instantly turned his head, and exclaimed, "Why, it's M. Folgat! Good-morning, sir!"

The young advocate was not a little surprised to see himself immediately recognised. He should certainly not have known the detective, for it was more than three years since they had seen each other; and how often had they seen each other then? Twice, and not an hour each time. It is true that Goudar was one of those men whom nobody remembers. Of medium height, he was neither stout nor thin, neither dark nor light haired, neither young nor old. A clerk in a passport office would certainly have written him down thus: Forehead ordinary; nose, ordinary; mouth, ordinary; eyes, neutral colour; special marks, none. It could not be said that he looked stupid; but neither did he look intelligent. Everything in him was ordinary, indifferent, and undecided. Not one marked feature. He would necessarily pass unobserved, and be forgotten as soon as he had passed. "You find me busy securing my crops for the winter," he said to M. Folgat. "A pleasant job. However, I am at your service. Let me put these three bunches into their three bags, and I'll come down to you." This was the work of an instant; and, as soon as he had reached the ground, he turned to the young advocate and asked,—“Well, and what do you think of my garden?”

Then without waiting for a reply he begged M. Folgat to visit his domain, and, with all a landowner's enthusiasm, he proceeded to praise the flavour of his duchess pears, the bright colours of his dahlias, the new arrangements in his poultry-yard, and rabbit-houses, not forgetting the beauty of his pond, with its ducks of all colours and varieties. In his heart, M. Folgat cursed this enthusiasm; for time was being lost. But, when you expect a man to do you a service, you must at least flatter his weak side. Accordingly the young advocate did not spare his praises—he even pulled out his cigar-case, and, still with the view

of winning the detective's good graces, he offered it to him, saying,—“Will you accept one?”

“Thanks! I never smoke,” replied Goudar. And seeing the astonishment of the advocate, he added, “At least not at home.—I am inclined to think my wife dislikes the smell of tobacco.”

Positively, if M. Folgat had not known the man, he would have taken him for some simple inoffensive retired grocer, and, bowing to him politely, would have taken his leave. But he had seen him at work, knew his capacity and was anxious to profit by it; thus he followed him to his greenhouse, melonhouse, and marvellous asparagus-beds.

At last, however, Goudar conducted his guest to the end of the garden, to an arbour furnished with seats, saying,—“Now let us sit down, and tell me your business; for I know you did not come solely for the pleasure of seeing my domain.”

Goudar was one of those men who have heard in their lives more confessions than ten priests, ten lawyers, and ten doctors all together. You could tell him everything. Without a moment's hesitation, therefore, and without a break, M. Folgat related the whole story of Jacques's intrigue with the Countess de Claudieuse. The detective listened, without saying a word, without moving a muscle in his face. When the lawyer had finished, he simply ejaculated:—“Well?”

“First of all,” replied M. Folgat, “I should like to hear your opinion. Do you believe M. de Boiscoran's statement?”

“Why not? I have seen much stranger cases than that.”

“Then you think, that, in spite of the evidence against him, we must believe in his innocence?”

“Pardon me, I think nothing at all. Why, you must study a matter before you can give an opinion.” He smiled; and, looking at the young advocate, he added, “But why all these preliminaries? What do you want of me?”

“Your assistance to arrive at the truth.”

The detective evidently expected something of the kind. After a minute's reflection, he looked fixedly at M. Folgat, and said,—“If I understand you correctly, you would like

to begin a counter-investigation for the benefit of the defence?"

"Exactly."

"And unknown to the prosecution?"

"Precisely."

"Well I cannot possibly serve you."

The young advocate was prepared for a certain amount of resistance; and he had thought of the means to overcome it. "That is not your final decision, my dear Goudar!" he said.

"Pardon me. I am not my own master. I have my duty to fulfil, and my daily occupations to attend to."

"You can at any time obtain leave of absence for a month."

"So I might; but they would certainly wonder at such a furlough at headquarters. They would probably have me watched; and if they found out that I was doing police work for private individuals, they would scold me grievously, and deprive themselves henceforth of my services."

"Oh!"

"There is no 'oh!' about it. They would do what I tell you, and they would be right; for after all what would become of us, and what would become of the safety and liberty of us all, if any one could come and use the agents of the police for his private purposes? And what would become of me if I should lose my place?"

"M. de Boiscoran's family is very rich, and they would prove their gratitude magnificently to the man who saved him."

"And if I did not save him? And if, instead of gathering proof of his innocence, I should only meet with more evidence of his guilt?"

The objection was so well founded, that M. Folgat preferred not to discuss it. "I might," he said, "hand you at once, and as a retainer, a considerable sum, which you could keep, whatever the result might be."

"What sum? A hundred napoleons? Certainly a hundred napoleons are not to be despised; but what would they do for me if I were turned out? I have somebody beside myself to think of. I have a wife and a child; and my whole fortune consists of this little cottage, which is not even entirely paid for. My place is not a goldmine; but, with the special rewards which I receive, it

brings me, good years and bad years, seven or eight thousand francs, and I can lay by two or three thousand."

The young lawyer stopped him by a friendly gesture, and said, "If I were to offer you ten thousand francs?"

"A year's income."

"If I offered you fifteen thousand?"

Goudar made no reply; but his eyes spoke.

"M. de Boiscoran's is a most interesting case," continued M. Folgat, "and such as does not often occur. The man who exposed the errors of the accusation would make a great reputation for himself."

"Would he make friends also at the public prosecution offices?"

"I admit he wouldn't."

The detective shook his head. "Well, I confess," he said, "I do not work for glory, nor from love of my art I knew very well that vanity is the great motive-power with some of my colleagues; but I am more practical. I have never liked my profession; and if I continue to practise it, it is because I have not the money to go into any other. It drives my wife to despair, besides: she is only half alive as long as I am away; and she trembles every morning for fear I may be brought home with a knife between my shoulders."

M. Folgat had listened attentively: but at the same time he had produced a pocket-book, which looked decidedly plethoric. "With fifteen thousand francs," he said, "a man may do something."

"That is true. There is a piece of land for sale adjoining my garden, which would suit me exactly. Flowers bring a good price in Paris, and that business would please my wife. Fruit, also, yields a good profit."

The advocate knew now that he had caught his man. "Remember, too, my dear Goudar, that, if you succeed, these fifteen thousand francs would only be a part payment. They might, perhaps, double the sum. M. de Boiscoran is the most liberal of men, and he would take pleasure in royally rewarding the man who saved him." As he spoke, he opened the pocketbook, and drew from it fifteen thousand-franc notes, which he spread out before him. "To any one but you," he went on, "I should hesitate to pay such a sum in advance. Another man might take the money, and never trouble himself about the affair."

But I know your uprightness; and, if you give me your word in return for the notes, I shall be satisfied. Come, shall it be so?"

The detective was evidently not a little excited; for, self-possessed as he ordinarily was, he had turned somewhat pale. He hesitated, handled the bank-notes, and then, all of a sudden, exclaimed,—“Wait two minutes.”

He got up instantly, and ran towards the house. “Is he going to consult his wife?” M. Folgat asked himself. Such was indeed his purpose, and the next moment the pair appeared at the other end of the garden walk engaged in a lively discussion. However, their talk did not last long, and Goudar came back to the arbour, exclaiming,—“Agreed! I am your man!”

The advocate was delighted, and shook his hand. “Thank you,” he cried; “for, with your assistance, I am almost sure of success. Unfortunately, we have no time to lose. When can you go to work?”

“This moment. Give me time to change my clothes; and I am at your service. You will have to give me the keys of the house at Passy.”

“I have them here in my pocket.”

“Well, then, let us go there at once; for I must, first of all, reconnoitre the ground. And you shall see if it takes me long to dress.”

In less than fifteen minutes he re-appeared in a long overcoat, looking, for all the world, like one of those retired grocers who have made a fortune, and settled somewhere outside the fortifications of Paris, displaying their idleness in broad daylight, and for ever repenting that they have given up their business. “Let us go,” he said to the lawyer, and then having bowed to Madame Goudar, who accompanied them to the front gate with a radiant smile, they got into the cab, and bid the driver to take them to No. 23 Rue des Vignes at Passy.

This Rue des Vignes is a curious street, leading nowhere, little known, and so deserted that the grass grows all over it. Long and dreary, hilly, muddy, scarcely paved, and full of holes, it looks much more like a wretched village lane than like a Parisian street. There are no shops, and indeed only a few houses intervening here and there between interminable walls, overtopped by lofty trees. “Ah! the place is well chosen for a mystery-

ous rendezvous," growled Goudar. "Too well chosen, I dare say; for we shall pick up no information here."

The vehicle stopped before a small door, in a thick wall, which bore numerous traces of the two sieges and their destructive effects. "Here is No. 23," said the driver; "but I see no house."

It could not be seen from the street; but on opening the door, M. Folgat and Goudar perceived it, rising in the centre of an immense garden, looking simple and pretty, with a double porch, a slate roof, and newly-painted shutters. "By Jove!" exclaimed the detective, "what a place for a gardener!"

M. Folgat detected so keenly the man's ill-concealed desire, that he at once replied,—“If we save M. de Boiscoran, I am sure he will not keep this house.”

"Let us go in," cried the detective, in a voice which revealed his intense desire to succeed.

Unfortunately, Jacques de Boiscoran had spoken but too truly, when he said that no trace was left of former days. Furniture, carpets, everything was new; and Goudar and M. Folgat in vain explored the four rooms on the ground floor, and the four rooms up stairs, together with the basement, where the kitchen was, and finally the garret. "We shall find nothing," declared the detective. "Though, to satisfy my conscience, I will come and spend an afternoon here: but now we have more important business. Let us go and see the neighbours!"

There are not many residents in the Rue des Vignes. A schoolmaster and a nurseryman, a locksmith, a jobmaster, five or six people of independent means, and last but not least, the keeper of a wine shop and eating-house, these constituted the entire population.

"We shall soon make the rounds," said Goudar, after having ordered the coachman to wait for them at the end of the street. On inquiring they found that neither the schoolmaster nor his assistants knew anything. The nurseryman had heard say that No. 23 belonged to an Englishman; but he had never seen him, and did not even know his name. The locksmith knew, however, that he was called Francis Burnett. He had done some work for him, and had frequently seen him; but it was so long since, that he did not think he would recognise him again. "We are unlucky," said M. Folgat, after this visit.

Fortunately, however, the livery stable-keeper had a somewhat more retentive memory. He said he knew the Englishman of No. 23 very well, having driven him three or four times; and the description he gave of his person fully corresponded with that of Jacques de Boiscoran. He also remembered that one evening in wretched weather, "Sir Burnett" came himself to order a carriage. It was for a lady, who got in alone, and was driven to the Place de la Madeleine. But it was a dark night; the lady wore a thick veil; he had not been able to distinguish her features, and all he could say was that she looked above medium height.

"It is always the same story," exclaimed Goudar. "But the wine-seller ought to be better informed. If I were alone, I would breakfast at his place."

"I will breakfast with you," said M. Folgat, and accordingly they both entered the tavern. The landlord did not know much himself, but his waiter, who had been with him some five or six years, knew "Sir Burnett," as everybody called the Englishman, by sight, and had been well acquainted with the servant-girl, Suky Wood. As he laid the cloth, he told the advocate and the detective all he knew. Suky, he said, was a tall, strapping girl, with hair red enough to set her bonnet on fire, and graceful enough to be mistaken for a heavy dragoon in female disguise. He had often had long talks with her when she had come to fetch some ready-made dish, or to buy some beer, of which she was very fond. She told him she was very pleased with her place, as she got plenty of money, and had, so to say, nothing to do, being left alone in the house for nine months in the year. From her the waiter had also learnt that "Sir Burnett" must have another house, as he only came to the Rue des Vignes to receive visits from a lady. This lady bothered Suky, who declared she had never been able to see the end of her nose even, so very cautious was she in all her movements, still she meant to try and get a glimpse of her face, if it were only possible.

"And you may be sure she managed to do so some time or other," whispered Goudar, who immediately gave vent to an exclamation of satisfaction on hearing from the waiter, that Suky had been very intimate with the servant of an old gentleman, living alone at No. 27. "That ser

vant must be seen," observed the detective, and, directly the meal was finished, M. Folgat and he walked towards the house in question.

Luckily the girl was alone, her master having just gone out. At first she was a little frightened at being called upon and questioned by two unknown men; but the detective knew how to reassure her very quickly, and then, being naturally a great talker, she speedily confirmed all the waiter had said, besides imparting some fresh information. She had been very intimate with Suky, who had not hesitated to tell her that Burnett was not an Englishman, that his name was not Burnett, and that he concealed himself in the Rue des Vignes under a false name, for the purpose of meeting his lady-love, who was a grand lady of marvellous beauty. Finally, at the outbreak of the war, Suky had told her that she was going back to England to her relations.

"We have obtained but little information," said Goudar to M. Folgat at the conclusion of this interview, "and the jury would pay little attention to it; still there is enough to confirm, at least in part, M. de Boiscoran's statement. We can prove that he met here a lady who had the greatest interest in remaining unknown. Was she the Countess de Claudieuse? We must find this out from Suky; for she has seen her, beyond all doubt. Hence we must hunt up Suky. And now let us get back to the cab, and go to headquarters. You can wait for me at the cafe opposite the Palais de Justice. I shall not be away more than a quarter of an hour."

He was absent, however, a good hour and a half; and M. Folgat was growing nervous, when at last he reappeared with a smile on his face. Sitting down in front of the advocate, he said,—"I have been away rather long; but I have not lost any time. In the first place, I have procured a month's leave of absence; and next I have put my hand upon the very man I wanted to send after 'Sir Burnett' and Miss Suky. He is a good fellow, named Barousse, and speaks English like a native. He asks twenty-five francs a day, his travelling-expenses, and a gratuity of fifteen hundred francs if he succeeds. I have agreed to meet him at six to give him a definite answer. If you accept his conditions, he will leave for England to-night."

By way of reply, M. Folgat drew a thousand-franc note from his pocket book, and said,—“Here is something to begin with.”

“Well, then, I must now leave you,” remarked Goudar, pocketing the note. “I am going to hang about the house where Madame de Claudieuse’s father, M. de Tassar, resides, and make inquiries. Perhaps I may pick up something. To-morrow I shall spend in searching the house in the Rue des Vignes, and in questioning all the tradesmen on your list. The day after I shall probably have finished here. So that in four or five days’ time I shall be at Sauveterre. I will do my best to save M. de Boiscoran. I will and must do so. He has too nice a house. Well, we shall see each other at Sauveterre.”

It was now four o’clock. M. Folgat left the cafe immediately after Goudar, and walked along the quay towards the Rue de l’Universite. He was anxious to see the Marquis and the Marchioness de Boiscoran. He found the former in his study, still under the effects of the painful interview which he had had with his wife in the morning. He had not said anything to the marchioness that he did not really feel; but he was distressed at having spoken as he had under such circumstances. And yet it was a kind of relief to him; for, to tell the truth, he felt as if the terrible doubts which he had kept secret so many years had vanished as soon as they were revealed. He gave M. Folgat a mournful reception, and the young advocate repeated the marchioness’s story in detail; adding, however, one thing of which she was in total ignorance, viz.,—the desperate resolution Jacques had formed. At this revelation the marquis appeared utterly overcome. “The unhappy fellow!” he cried. “What, he actually thought of killing himself!”

“Yes,” added M. Folgat, “and M. Magloire and myself had the greatest difficulty in overcoming his resolution, the greatest trouble to make him understand that under no circumstances ought an innocent man to think of committing suicide.”

A big tear rolled down the old gentleman’s furrowed cheek. “Ah! I have been cruelly unjust,” he murmured. “Poor, unhappy boy!” Then he added aloud,—“But I intend to see him. I have determined to accompany the marchioness to Sauveterre. When do you propose to leave?”

"Nothing keeps me here in Paris. I have done all that can be done, and I might return this evening. But I am really too tired. I think I shall take the 10.45 train to-morrow morning."

"If you do so, we will travel in company. I will meet you to-morrow at ten o'clock at the Orleans station. We shall reach Sauveterre by midnight."

XIX

WHEN the Marchioness de Boiscoran went to see her son in prison prior to her departure for Paris, Denise had asked if she might accompany her. The marchioness however preferred to go alone, and the young girl did not insist. "I see they are trying to conceal something from me," she said to herself, "but it does not matter."

During the whole day she remained meditating; and her thoughtfulness was so evident that her grandfather and aunts grew quite nervous, wondering what new idea had got possession of her mind. On the morrow they were still in the same perplexity when Denise suddenly insisted on going to her dressmakers', where, finding Mechin the clerk, she remained in conference with him for a full half-hour. Then in the evening, as Dr. Seignebos was leaving the drawing-room, after a short visit, she hastened after him, and kept him engaged in conversation for a long time at the hall-door. Finally, on the day after, she asked once more to be allowed to go and see Jacques. This sad satisfaction could be no longer refused her, and it was arranged that she should visit the prison in company with the elder of the Demoiselles de Lavarande, Mademoiselle Adelaide.

It was two o'clock in the afternoon when they knocked at the prison gate, and asked the jailer to be allowed to see Jacques. "I'll go for him at once, madame," replied Blangin. "In the meantime pray step into my room: the prison parlour is rather damp, and the less you stay in it the better it will be."

Denise followed the jailer's advice, or rather she did a great deal more; for leaving her aunt downstairs, she drew Madame Blangin into the upper room, having something to say to her as she pretended. When they came down:

stairs again, Blangin announced that M. de Boiscoran was waiting.

"Come!" said Denise to her aunt. But she had not taken ten steps along the narrow passage leading to the parlour before she stopped short. She even tottered, and had to lean against the wall, reeking as it was with moisture.

"Good heavens, you are ill!" cried Mademoiselle Adelaide.

Denise signalled her to be silent. "Oh, it is nothing!" she said. "Be quiet!" And gathering up all her strength, and resting her little hand upon the old lady's shoulder, she added, "My darling aunty, you must render us an immense service. It is all important that I should speak to Jacques alone. It would be very dangerous for us to be overheard. I know they often set spies to listen to a prisoner's talk. Please, dear aunt, do remain in the passage, and give us warning if anybody should come."

"Do not think of such a thing, dear child. Would it be proper?"

"Was it proper when I came and spent a night here?" asked Denise in reply. "Alas! in our position, everything is proper that may be useful." Aunt Adelaide making no rejoinder, Mademoiselle de Chandore felt sure of her perfect submission, and walked on towards the parlour.

"Denise!" cried Jacques as soon as she entered,—
"Denise!" He was standing in the centre of this mournful room, looking whiter than the whitened walls, but apparently calm and almost smiling. It required a powerful effort of will to control the thoughts which battled in his breast; but he could not allow his betrothed to see his despair; on the contrary, he was bound to do everything he could to reassure her. So he advanced towards her, took her hands in his, and said, "Ah, it is so kind of you to come! I have looked for you ever since the morning. I have been watching and waiting, and listening at each noise I heard. But will you ever forgive me for causing you to come to a place like this, untidy and ugly, without even the fatal poetry of horror about it?"

Denise looked at him with such obstinate fixity, that the words died on his lips. "Why hide the truth?" she asked sadly.

"Hide the truth!"

"Yes. Why do you affect this gaiety and tranquillity, which are so far from your heart? Have you no longer confidence in me? Do you think I am a child, from whom the truth must be concealed, or so feeble and worthless that I cannot bear my share of your troubles? Do not smile, Jacques, for I know you have no hope."

"You are mistaken, Denise, I assure you."

"No, Jacques. They are concealing something from me, I know, and I do not ask you to tell me what it is. I know quite enough. You will have to appear in court."

"I beg your pardon. That question has not yet been decided."

"But it will be decided, and against you."

Jacques knew very well it would be so and dreaded it; but he still insisted on playing his part. "Well," he said, "even if I do appear in court, I shall be acquitted."

"Are you quite sure of that?"

"I have ninety-nine chances out of a hundred for me."

"There is one, then, against you," cried the young girl. And seizing Jacques's hands, and pressing them with a force of which he would never have suspected her, she added,—*"You have no right to run that one chance."*

Jacques trembled in all his limbs. Was it possible? Did he understand her? Did Denise herself come and suggest to him that act of supreme despair, from which his counsel had so strongly dissuaded him? "What do you mean?" he asked with trembling voice.

"You must fly."

"Fly?"

"Nothing is easier. I have considered the whole matter thoroughly. The jailers are in our pay. I have just come to an understanding with Blangin's wife. One evening, as soon as night falls, they will open the doors to you. A horse will be ready for you outside the town, and relays will be prepared. In four hours you can reach La Rochelle. There, one of those pilot-boats which can stand any storm will take you on board, and carry you to England."

Jacques shook his head. "That cannot be," he replied. "I am innocent. I cannot abandon all I hold dear,—you, Denise."

A deep flush covered the girl's cheeks. "I have ex

pressed myself badly," she stammered. "You shall not go alone."

He raised his hands to heaven. "My God!" he cried, "Thou grantest me this consolation!"

Meanwhile Denise continued in a firmer voice:—"Did you think I would be base enough to forsake my friend even if he should be abandoned by everybody else? No, no! Grandpapa and my aunts will accompany me, and we will meet you in England. You will change your name, and go to America; and far in the West, we will find some new country where we can establish ourselves. True, it will not be France. But the country for us, Jacques, is where we can be free, where we are beloved, where we are happy."

At these words, Jacques de Boiscoran was moved to his innermost heart. How could he retain any longer his mask of impressive indifference? Was there a man upon the earth who could receive a more glorious proof of love and devotion? And from whom! From a young girl, who united in herself all those qualities, a single one of which would make others proud,—intelligence and grace, high rank and fortune, beauty and angelic purity. Ah! she did not hesitate, as another had done; she did not make a science of duplicity, nor practise hypocrisy as though it were a virtue. She yielded up herself, without the slightest reserve. And all this at the very moment when Jacques saw everything else around him crumble to pieces, when he was on the very brink of despair! This happiness was indeed so great, so unexpected, that it well-nigh paralysed him.

For a moment he could not move, he could not think. Then all of a sudden drawing his betrothed to him, pressing her convulsively to his bosom and covering her hair with kisses, he cried,—“I bless you, oh, my darling! I bless you, my well-beloved! I shall mourn no longer. Whatever may happen, I have had my share of heavenly bliss.”

She thought he consented. Palpitating like a bird in a child's hand, she drew back, and looking at Jacques with ineffable love and tenderness, exclaimed:—“Let us fix the day!”

“What day?”

“The day for your flight.”

This word alone recalled Jacques to a sense of his fearful position. He was soaring in the supreme heights of bliss, and he was plunged down into the cold depths of reality. His face, radiant with joy, grew dark in an instant, and he said sadly,—“That dream is too beautiful to be realised.”

“What do you say?” she stammered.

“I cannot, I must not, escape!”

“You refuse me, Jacques?” continued Denise. “You refuse me, when I swear to you that I will join you, and share your exile? Do you doubt my word? Do you fear that my grandfather or my aunts might keep me here in spite of myself?”

As this suppliant voice fell upon his ears, Jacques felt as if all his energy were abandoning him, and his will was shaken. “I beseech you, Denise,” he said, “do not insist, do not deprive me of my courage.”

She was evidently suffering intolerable agony. There was a gleam of fire in her eyes, and her parched lips quivered. “You will submit to being brought up in court?” she asked.

“Yes!”

“And if you are condemned?”

“I may be, I know.”

“This is madness!” cried Denise, wringing her hands in despair,—“My God,” she added, “inspire me! How can I bend him? What must I say? Jacques, do you love me no longer? For my sake, if not for your own, I beseech you let us fly! You escape disgrace; you secure liberty. Can nothing touch you? What more do you want? Must I throw myself at your feet?” While saying this, she let herself sink in reality to the ground. “Fly!” she repeated again and again. “Oh, fly!”

Like all truly energetic men, Jacques recovered his self-possession, by the very excess of his emotion. Gathering together his bewildered thoughts, he raised Denise, and carried her, almost fainting, to the rough prison bench; then, kneeling down by her side, and taking her hands, he said,—“Denise, for pity’s sake, come to yourself and listen to me. I am innocent; and to fly would be to confess that I am guilty.”

“Ah! what does that matter?”

“Do you think that my escape would stop the trial?”

No. Although absent, I should be tried, and found guilty without any opposition : I should be condemned, disgraced irrevocably dishonoured."

"What does it matter?"

He felt that his arguments would never bring her back to reason. He rose, therefore, and said in a firm voice,—
"Let me tell you what you do not know. To fly would be easy I agree. I think, as you do, I could reach England readily enough, and we might even take ship there without trouble. But what then? The cable is faster than the fastest steamer; and, upon landing on American soil, I should, no doubt, be met by agents with orders to arrest me. But suppose even I should escape this first danger. Do you think there is in all this world an asylum for incendiaries and murderers? There is none. At the extreme confines of civilisation I should still meet with police-agents and soldiers, who, with an extradition treaty in hand, would give me up to the government of my country. If I were alone, I might possibly escape all these dangers. But I should never succeed if I had you near me, as well as Grandpapa Chandore, and your two aunts."

Denise was forcibly struck by these objections, of which she had had no idea. She said nothing, but let her lover continue speaking—"Still, suppose we might possibly escape all such dangers. What would our life be! I should have to hide and fly incessantly; to avoid the looks of every suspicious stranger; to tremble, constantly, at the thought of discovery! With me, Denise, your existence would be like that of some bandit's wife. And you ought to know that such a life is so intolerable, that hardened criminals have been unable to endure it, and have given themselves up simply to secure the boon of one night's quiet sleep."

Big tears were rolling down the poor girl's cheeks. "Perhaps you are right, Jacques," she murmured, "but, O Jacques, if they should condemn you!"

"Well, I should at least have done my duty. I should have met fate, and defended my honour. And, whatever the sentence may be, it will not overwhelm me; for, as long as my heart beats, I mean to defend myself. And, if I die before I succeed in proving my innocence, I shall leave it to you, Denise, to your kindred, and to my friends, to continue the struggle, and to restore my honour."

She fully comprehended and appreciated these sentiments. "I was wrong, Jacques," she said, offering him her hand; "you must forgive me."

So saying, she rose, and was about to leave the room, when Jacques retained her, exclaiming, "I do not mean to fly; but would not the people who have agreed to favour my escape be willing to furnish me with the means for passing a few hours outside the prison?"

"I think they would," replied Denise; "and if you wish, I will make sure of it."

"Yes. That might be a last resort."

With these words they parted, exhorting each other to keep up their courage, and promising to meet again in a day or two.

In the passage Denise found her poor aunt Lavarande very tired from her long watch; and they hastened home together. "How pale you are!" exclaimed M. de Chandore, when he saw his granddaughter; "and how red your eyes are! What has happened?"

In reply she told him everything; and the old gentleman felt a chill run through him, when he learnt that if Jacques had chosen he might have carried Denise away. Still he had not done so. "Ah, Boiscoran's an honest man!" said the baron, and pressing his lips to Denise's brow, he added,—"And you love him more than ever?"

"Alas!" she replied, "is he not more unhappy than ever?"

XX.

ALL Sauveterre soon knew that Mademoiselle de Chandore had been to see Jacques de Boiscoran in prison; and many and varied were the comments exchanged concerning this "surprising" event. The ladies of society were inexpressibly shocked and scandalised. Indeed, the Sauveterre folks claim to be exceedingly virtuous, and consequently fancy they have the right to be extremely severe when any question of propriety has to be decided. Thus any person who defies public opinion is lost. Now, public opinion was decidedly against Jacques de Boiscoran. He was down, and everybody was ready to kick him. "Would he get out of it?" was a question discussed day

after day at the Cercle Litteraire—a question which had called forth torrents of eloquence, fostered interminable discussions, and even provoked two or three serious quarrels, one of which had resulted in a duel. Still people no longer asked themselves, “Is he innocent?” Dr. Seignebos’s eloquence, M. Seneschal’s influence, and Mechinet’s cunning plots had all failed. “Ah, what an interesting trial it will be!” said many people who were all eagerness to know who would be the presiding judge, in order to apply for tickets of admission to the court. Day by day the interest in the case became more intense, and all who were in any way connected with it were watched with the greatest curiosity. Everybody wanted to know what they were doing, what they thought, and what they said.

An additional proof of Jacques’s guilt was found in the fact of the Marquis de Boiscoran’s continued absence from Sauveterre: while M. Folgat’s prolonged presence created no small wonder. His extreme reserve, which people ascribed to an excessive, ill-placed pride, had made him generally disliked; and it was remarked that he must have little enough to do in Paris, since he could spend all his time at Sauveterre.

The editor of the local newspaper—*L’Independent de Sauveterre*—naturally found the affair a veritable gold-mine. He forgot an old feud with the editor of *L’Impartial de la Seudre* on the score of political differences, and filled his journal with speculations concerning the “Boiscoran Affair”—printing, moreover, in large type any trifling information that came to his knowledge, such as the state of the Count de Claudieuse’s health, which still remained precarious; the visits Jacques had received in prison since his solitary confinement had terminated, and finally the sudden departure of Madame de Boiscoran and M. Folgat for Paris. Never had “*L’Independent*” been read with so much interest. And, as everybody wished to be better informed than his neighbour, a number of idle fellows assumed the duty of watching Jacques’s friends, spending their time in trying to find out what was going on at M. de Chandore’s house. Thus it happened that on the evening of the day when Denise visited Jacques in prison the street was full of curious people, who, at about half-past ten, saw M. de Chandore’s carriage come out of the courtyard, and drawn up at the door. At eleven o’clock M. de

Chandore and Dr. Seignebois got in, the coachman whipped the horses, and the vehicle disappeared down the street. "Where can they be going?" asked the sight-seers. Full of curiosity they followed the carriage, which took the road leading to the railway station. A telegram from M. Folgat had apprised M. de Chandore of the young advocate's return with the Marquis and Marchioness de Boiscoran. According to the time-tables the travellers should have reached their destination at five minutes before midnight, but the branch service which connects Sauveterre with the main Orleans line is not noted for punctuality, and, when half-past twelve struck, the train had not yet been signalled. Everything around was silent and deserted. Through the office windows the station master might be seen fast asleep in his huge leather-seated chair. Clerks and porters also were resting, stretched out on the benches of the waiting-room. But people are accustomed to such delays at Sauveterre; they are prepared for being kept waiting; and the doctor and M. de Chandore walked up and down the platform, without displaying either astonishment or impatience. Nor would they have been much surprised if they had been told they were being closely watched, for they knew their good town, its singularities and foibles.

At last, towards one o'clock, the telegraph gave notice, a bell rang, and the station seemed to start into life. The station-master opened his door; the porters stretched themselves and rubbed their eyes: there was a brisk exchange of orders and exclamations; doors were slammed to, trucks wheeled right and left, and then a low roar was heard approaching and a fierce red light some distance up the line shone out in the dark night like a ball of fire. At the same moment M. de Chandore and the doctor hastened to the waiting room. The train stopped. A carriage door opened, and the marchioness appeared, leaning on M. Folgat's arm. The marquis, a travelling-bag in hand, followed behind.

"So that is what they were waiting for!" exclaimed the volunteer spies, who had flattened their noses against the window panes. And as the train brought no other passengers for Sauveterre, they hastened back to the town, being eager to proclaim the arrival of the prisoner's father. The hour was unfavourable, for most people were abed; still

there was of course a chance that somebody would be found at the club, where late hours are kept, owing to the gambling proclivities of several of the members. Among these latter the indefatigable newshunters would in all probability find willing ears to listen to the interesting information which they were so eager to spread. Still had they not been in such a hurry to hawk it all over the town, they might have witnessed, perhaps not entirely unmoved, this first interview between M. de Chandore and the Marquis de Boiscoran.

By a natural impulse they both stepped forward, and warmly grasped each other's hand. Tears stood in their eyes, and their lips parted as if to speak, still they said nothing. Indeed there was no need of words between them, for that mutual grasp had fully revealed their sufferings. They remained thus standing motionless, looking at each other, when Dr. Seignebos, who could not continue still for any length of time, came up to them and exclaimed, "The trunks are on the carriage: shall we go?"

They at once left the station. The night was clear; and against the pale blue starlit sky on the horizon, far above the dark mass of the sleeping town, there rose the towers of the old castle, which now served as the prison of Sauvetterre. "So that is the place where my Jacques is kept," murmured the marquis. "There he is imprisoned, accused of horrible crimes."

"We will get him out of it," replied the doctor cheerfully, as he helped the old gentleman into the carriage. But in vain did he try to rouse the spirits of his companions. His hopes found no echo in their distressed hearts. M. Folgat inquired after Denise, whom he had been surprised not to see at the station, and M. de Chandore replied that she had stopped at home, with the Demoiselles de Lavarande, to keep M. Magloire company. Meanwhile the marquis had enough to do to suppress the spasmodic sobs which would every now and then rise in his throat. He was upset by the thought that he was at Sauvetterre. Whatever may be said to the contrary, distance does weaken our emotions. Shaking hands with M. de Chandore in person had moved him more deeply than all the letters he had received in Paris. And when he saw Jacques's prison from afar, he had the first clear notion of the moral tortures endured by his son. As for the mar-

chioness she was utterly exhausted ; it seemed as if her system were giving way. M. de Chandore trembled when he looked at the unhappy father and mother and contemplated their despair. If they were so downcast what could he hope for,—he, who knew how indissolubly Denise's fate in life was linked with Jacques's ?

At length the carriage stopped before the house. The door was opened instantly, and the marchioness found herself in Denise's arms, and soon afterwards she was comfortably seated in an easy-chair. The others had followed her. It was past two o'clock in the morning, but every minute now was valuable. Accordingly, Dr. Seignebos, after adjusting his spectacles, exclaimed, "I propose that we exchange our information. I, for my part, am still at the same point. But you know my views. I do not give them up. Cocolou is an impostor, and it shall be proved. I appear to notice him no longer ; but in reality I watch him more closely than ever."

At this point Denise interrupted him saying,—“Before anything is decided, there is one fact which you all ought to know. Listen.” Then, pale as death, for it cost her a great struggle to reveal the secret of her heart, but in a voice full of energy, and with an eye full of fire, she told them what she had already confessed to her grandfather, viz., the propositions she had made to Jacques, and his obstinate refusal to accede to them.

“Well done, mademoiselle !” cried Dr. Seignebos, full of enthusiasm. “Well done ! Jacques is very unfortunate, but still he is to be envied.”

Denise finished her recital. Then, turning with a triumphant air to M. Magloire, she added, “After that, is there any one who could yet believe that Jacques is a vile assassin ?”

The eminent advocate was not one of those men who set their opinions above the truth itself. “I confess,” he said, “that if I were to go and see Jacques to-morrow for the first time, I should not speak to him as I did before.”

“And I,” exclaimed the Marquis de Boiscoran,—“I declare that I answer for my son as for myself, and I mean to tell him so to-morrow.” Then turning towards his wife and speaking so low, that she alone could hear him, he added, “And I hope you will forgive me those suspicions the mere idea of which now fills me with horror.”

But the marchioness did not reply. She had no strength left: she fainted, and had to be removed, accompanied by Denise and the Demoiselles de Lavarande. As soon as they were out of the room, Dr. Seignebos locked the door, rested his elbow on the chimney-piece, and taking off his spectacles to wipe them, said to M. Folgat, "Now we can speak freely. What news do you bring us?"

XXI.

ELEVEN o'clock had just struck that same morning, when Blangin, the jailer, entered Jacques's cell in the most excited manner, exclaiming, "Sir, your father is downstairs."

The prisoner jumped up as if he had received the shock of an electric battery. The night before he had had a note from M. de Chandore, informing him of the marquis's arrival; and his whole time had since been spent in preparing himself for the interview. How would it tend? Did his father doubt him, or did he believe in his innocence? Jacques had been left in ignorance of the marquis's sentiments. Accordingly, he had resolved to retain an attitude of reserve; and as he followed Blangin along the dismal passage and down the interminable steps, he tried to compose respectful phrases, and to look self-possessed. But before he could utter a single word he was in his father's arms. He felt himself pressed against the marquis's heart, and heard him stammer, "Jacques, my dear son, my unfortunate boy!"

In all his life, long and stormy as it had been, the marquis had not been tried so severely. Drawing Jacques to one of the parlour-windows, and leaning back a little, so as to see him better, he was amazed that he could ever have doubted his son. It seemed to him that he was standing there himself. He recognized his own features and bearing, his own frank but rather haughty expression, his own clear, bright eye. Then suddenly noticing details, he was shocked to perceive that Jacques looked so fearfully pale, and that more than one silvery hair peered forth amid his thick black curls. "Poor fellow!" said the marquis, "how you must have suffered!"

"I thought I should lose my senses," replied Jacques

simply. And with a tremour in his voice he asked, "But, dear father, why did you give no sign of life? Why did you stay away so long?"

The marquis was not unprepared for such a question. But how could he answer it? Could he ever tell Jacques the true secret of his hesitation? Turning his eyes aside, he answered, "I hoped I should be able to serve you better by remaining in Paris."

His embarrassment was too evident to escape Jacques's notice. "You did not doubt your own son, father?" he asked sadly.

"Never!" cried the marquis, "I never doubted a moment. Ask your mother, and she will tell you it was this proud assurance that I felt which kept me from coming down with her. When I heard of what they accused you, I said at once 'It is absurd!'"

Jacques shook his head and rejoined, "The accusation was absurd; and yet you see what it has brought me to."

Two big tears, which he could no longer retain, rolled down the old gentleman's cheeks. "You blame me, Jacques," he said. "You blame your father."

The man is rare who could see his father shed tears, and not feel his heart melt within him. All the resolutions Jacques had formed vanished in an instant. Pressing his father's hand in his own, he said,—“No, I do not blame you, father. And still I have no words to tell you how much your absence has added to my sufferings. I thought I was abandoned, disowned.”

For the first time since his imprisonment, the unfortunate man found a friend to whom he could confide all the bitterness that filled his heart. With his mother, and with Denise, honour forbade him to show his despair. M. Magloire's incredulity had made all confidence impossible, and M. Folgat, although as sympathetic as man could be, was, after all, a perfect stranger. But now he had near him a friend, the dearest and most precious friend that a man can ever have,—his father; now he had nothing to fear. "Is there a human being in this world," he said, "whose misfortunes equal mine? To be innocent, and not to be able to prove it! To know the guilty one, and not to dare mention the name. Ah! at first I did not take in the whole horror of my situation. I was frightened, to be sure; but I trusted that justice would discover the

truth. Justice! It was my friend Galpin-Daveline who represented it, and he cared little enough for the truth: his only aim was to prove that the man whom he accused was guilty. Read the papers, father, and you will see how I have been victimised by the most unheard-of combination of circumstances. Everything is against me. Never has that mysterious, blind, and absurd power, that awful power which we call fate, manifested itself so clearly. At first a sense of honour kept me from mentioning the Countess de Claudieuse's name, and then prudence. The first time I mentioned it to M. Magloire he told me I lied. Then I thought everything lost, I saw no other end but the court, and, after trial, the galleys or the scaffold. I wanted to kill myself. My friends made me understand that I did not belong to myself, and that, as long as I had a spark of energy and a ray of intelligence left me, I had not the right to dispose of my life."

"Poor, poor boy!" said the marquis. "No, you have no such right."

"Yesterday," continued Jacques, "Denis came to see me. Do you know what brought her here? She offered to fly with me. Father, the temptation was almost irresistible. Once free, with Denise by my side, what should I care for the world? She insisted, like the matchless girl that she is; and on the very spot where you now stand, she threw herself at my feet, imploring me to fly. I doubt whether I can save my life; still I would not go."

He felt deeply moved, and sank upon the rough bench, hiding his face in his hands, perhaps to conceal his tears. Suddenly however, he was seized with one of those attacks of passion which had mastered him but too often during his imprisonment, and he exclaimed,—“But what have I done to deserve this punishment?”

The marquis's brow suddenly darkened; and he replied in a solemn tone,—“You coveted your neighbour's wife, my son.”

Jacques shrugged his shoulders. “I loved the Countess de Claudieuse,” he said, “and she loved me.”

“Adultery is a crime, Jacques.”

“A crime? True, Magloire said the same thing. But, father, do you really consider it is? Then it is a crime which has certainly nothing appalling about it—a crime of which everybody is inclined to boast, and at which the

world smiles. The law, it is true, gives the husband the right of life and death; but, if you appeal to the law, it simply gives the guilty man six months' imprisonment, or makes him pay a few thousand francs."

Ah, if he had known his father's secret, he would never have spoken thus!

"Jacques," said the marquis, "the Countess de Claudieuse hints, as you say, that her youngest daughter is your child?"

"It may be so."

The Marquis de Boiscoran shuddered. Then he exclaimed bitterly,—*"It may be so! You say that carelessly, indifferently, madman that you are! Did you never think of the grief the Count de Claudieuse would feel if he should learn the truth? Or even if he merely suspected it! Can you not comprehend that such a suspicion is quite sufficient to embitter a whole life? Have you never realised that the harbouring of such a doubt inflicts a more cruel punishment than anything you have yet suffered?"* He paused. A few words more, and he would probably have betrayed his secret. Checking his excitement by a sustained effort, he added,—*"But I did not come here to discuss this question: I came to tell you, that, whatever may happen, your father will stand by you, and that, if you must undergo the disgrace of appearing in court, I will take a seat by your side."*

In spite of his own great trouble, Jacques had not been able to avoid noticing his father's unusual excitement and sudden vehemence. For a second he had a vague perception of the truth; but, before the suspicion could take form, it had vanished in presence of his father's promise to sit beside him and face the humiliation of a trial in open court. This self-abnegation and display of paternal love touched Jacques deeply. *"Ah, father!"* exclaimed he, *"I ought to ask your pardon for ever having doubted your heart one single moment."*

M. de Boiscoran tried his best to recover his self-possession. At last in an earnest voice he said,—*"Yes, I love you, my son: still you must not make me more of a hero than I am. I yet hope we may be spared an appearance in court."*

"Has anything new been discovered?"

"M. Folgat has found some traces which justify legiti

mate hopes, although, as yet, no real success has been achieved."

Jacques looked rather discouraged. "Traces?" he asked.

"Be patient. They are feeble traces, I admit, and such as could not be produced in court; but from day to day they may become decisive. And already they have had one good effect: they have brought us back M. Magloire."

"O if I could only be saved!"

"I shall leave to M. Folgat," continued the marquis, "the satisfaction of telling you the result of his efforts. He can explain their bearing better than I could. And you will not have long to wait; for last night, or rather this morning, when we separated, he and M. Magloire agreed to meet here at the prison before two o'clock."

A few minutes later a rapid step was heard in the passage; and Frumence Cheminot, the prisoner of whom Blangin had made an assistant, and whom Mechinet had employed to carry Jacques's letters to Denise, entered the parlour. He was a tall, strapping fellow of five or six and twenty, whose large mouth and small eyes were perpetually smiling. Although to-day a vagabond, without hearth or home, Frumence had once been a landowner. At his parents' death, when he was eighteen years old, he had come into possession of a house, flanked by a yard and garden, together with several acres of arable land, and a salt meadow, the whole worth about fifteen thousand francs. Unfortunately, the conscription was near; and when Frumence plunged his hand into the urn to decide whether he would have to go soldiering or not, to his horror and consternation, he drew out a bad number. As, despite his health and his muscles, he had an intense dislike for military service, he resolved to raise some money with the object of buying a substitute. Being a landowner, he soon met with an obliging person who agreed to lend him 3,500 francs for the space of two years in return for a first mortgage on his property. When the papers were signed, and Frumence had the money in his pocket, he set out for Rochefort, where dealers in substitutes abounded; and for two thousand francs, exclusive of some smaller items, he was provided with a substitute of the first quality. Delighted with the operation, Frumence was about to return home, when his evil star led

him to sup with a countryman, a former schoolmate, and now a sailor on board a coal-barge. Of course, when countrymen meet they must drink. And to be brief, Frumence indulged in such numerous potations that, after a fortnight's carouse, he was glad to borrow five francs from the stage-driver to enable him to get home. He had lost all taste for work, and acquired a real passion for tavern life and card play. He got more deeply into debt, sold all he possessed that was saleable, and being unable to pay the 3,500 francs he owed, his lands were sold, and one fine day he found himself in the street, possessing literally nothing in the world but the wretched clothes on his back. He might easily have found employment; for he was a good workman, and people were fond of him in spite of all. But he was even more afraid of work than he was fond of drink. So he became a vagabond, a loafer, dependent for subsistence on such kind-hearted toppers and hospitable housewives as he came across, and little by little, hunger being ever at hand, he turned marauder, pilfering some orchard of fruit, or digging potatoes in strangers' fields and cooking them in the corner of a wood. And such being his destitute condition, if he found neither potatoes in the fields, nor apples in the orchards, what else was left for him to do but to leap a fence, or scale a wall?

Relatively speaking, he was an honest man, incapable of stealing a piece of money; but with vegetables, fruit, poultry, and so on, he was not so particular. Thus it had come about that he was twice arrested, and condemned to several days' imprisonment; and each time he solemnly vowed that he would never be caught at it again, and that for the future he intended to work hard. And yet, unfortunately, he *had* been caught again. He had told his misfortunes to Jacques; and the latter, grateful to him for having facilitated his correspondence with Denise, felt kindly disposed towards him. When he saw him enter the prison parlour, cap in hand, he inquired,—“What's the matter, Frumence?”

“Sir,” replied the vagrant, “M. Blangin sends you word that the two advocates wish to see you.”

Hearing these words the marquis embraced his son once more. “Do not let them wait,” he said, “and above all keep up your courage.”

XXII.

THE Marquis de Boiscoran had not been mistaken about M. Magloire, who, already shaken by Denise's statement, had been completely overcome by M. Folgat's explanations. He now came to the jail, with the expressed determination to do his utmost to prove Jacques's innocence. "But I doubt very much whether he will ever forgive me for my previous incredulity," said he to M. Folgat, while they were waiting for the prisoner in his cell.

Jacques entered, still deeply moved by the interview he had just had with his father. M. Magloire at once approached him, saying—"I have never been able to conceal my thoughts. When I fancied you were guilty, and that you accused the Countess de Claudieuse falsely, I told you so with almost brutal candour. I have since found out my error, and am now convinced of the truth of your statement: so I come to tell you frankly, Jacques, that I was wrong to have had more faith in a woman's reputation than in a friend's honest word. Will you give me your hand."

Jacques did so instantly, joyfully exclaiming:—"Since you believe in my innocence, others may be induced to believe in it too. My salvation is drawing near."

While these words were being exchanged, M. Folgat had spread out on the table all the papers he had brought with him,—copies of official documents furnished by Mechin, and notes taken during his rapid journey. "First of all, my dear client," he said, "I must inform you of what has been done." He then recounted in detail the steps that Goudar and he had taken, concluding as follows:—"Let us sum up. We are able to prove three things: 1. That the house in the Rue des Vignes belongs to you; and that you and Sir Francis Burnett, who is known there, are one and the same person; 2. That you were visited at this house by a lady, who, judging by the precautions she took, had powerful reasons to remain unknown; 3. That this lady's visits took place at certain epochs every year, coinciding with the journeys which the Countess de Claudieuse made to Paris. Then for ourselves, we have another certainty,—that Suky Wood, the servant of the false Sir Francis Burnett, watched the mysterious lady

that she saw her, and consequently would know her again. This is evident from the deposition of the girl's friend. Consequently, if we discover Suky Wood, the Countess de Claudieuse is unmasked."

"If we discover her," said M. Magloire. "But here, unfortunately, we enter into the region of suppositions."

"Suppositions!" said M. Folgat. "Well, call them so; but they are based upon positive facts, and supported by a hundred precedents. Why should we not find this Suky Wood, whose birthplace and family we know, and who has no motive for concealment? Goudar has often ferreted out very different people to her; and you may be sure that Goudar will not sleep. I have held out to him a hope which will make him accomplish miracles,—the hope of receiving the house in the Rue des Vignes as a reward, should he only be successful. The stakes are so magnificent: he must win the game,—he who has won so many already. Who knows what he may not have discovered since I left him?"

Older than either M. Folgat or Jacques, the eminent advocate of Sauveterre was less ready to feel enthusiasm. "Yes," he observed, "what you say is true enough; and, if we only had time, I might say with you, 'We shall win the day!' But there is no time for Goudar's investigations: the assizes are at hand, and I fear it would be very difficult to obtain a postponement."

"Besides, I do not wish the case to be postponed," said Jacques.

"But—"

"On no account, Magloire, never! What? I should have to endure three months more of this torture? I could not do it; my strength is exhausted. This uncertainty has been too much for me. I could bear no more suspense."

"Do not trouble yourself about that," interrupted M. Folgat, "a postponement is out of question. On what pretext could we ask for it? The only way would be to introduce an entirely new element into the case. We should have to summon the Countess de Claudieuse."

The greatest surprise was apparent on Jacques's face. "Shall we not summon her anyhow?" he asked.

"That depends."

"I do not understand you."

"It is very simple, however. If Goudar should succeed, before the trial, in collecting sufficient evidence against her, I should summon her certainly; and then the case would naturally change entirely; the whole proceedings would begin anew; and you would probably appear only as a witness. If, on the contrary, we obtain, before the trial begins, no other proof but what we now have, I shall not mention her name even; for that would, in my and in M. Magloire's opinion, ruin your cause irrevocably."

"Yes," said the great advocate, "that is my opinion."

Jacques's amazement was great. "Still," he said, "if I am brought up in court, I must, in self-defence, speak of my connection with the Countess de Claudieuse."

"No."

"But that is my only explanation. Do you think you could defend me, do you think you could save me, without telling the truth?"

M. Folgat shook his head. "In court," said he, "the truth, as we are at present situated, is the last thing to be thought of. Do you fancy the jury would credit allegations which M. Magloire did not credit? No. Well, then, we had better not speak of them any more, and try to find some explanation which will meet the charges brought against you. Do you think we should be the first to act thus? By no means. There are very few cases in which the prosecution says all it knows, and still fewer in which the defence calls for everything it might call for. Out of ten criminal trials, there are at least three in which side-issues are raised. What will be the charge in court against you? The substance of the romance which the magistrate has invented in order to prove your guilt. You must meet him with another romance which proves your innocence."

"But the truth—"

"Is dependent on probability, my dear client. Ask M. Magloire. The prosecution only relies on probability: hence probability is all the defence has to care for. Human justice is feeble, and limited in its attributes; it cannot dive to the very bottom of things; it cannot judge motives, and fathom consciences. It can only judge from appearances, and decide by plausibility; there is hardly a case which has not some unexplored mystery, some undiscovered secret. The truth! Ah! do you think M. Galpin

has looked for it? If he did, why did he not summon Cocoleu? But no, as long as he can produce a criminal, who may be responsible for the crime, he is quite content. The truth! Which of us knows the real truth? Your case, M. de Boiscoran, is one of those in which neither the prosecution, nor the defence, not even the accused himself, knows the truth of the matter."

There followed a long silence, so perfect that one could hear the sentinel pacing up and down under the prison-windows. M. Folgat had said all he thought proper to say: he feared, in saying more, to assume too great a responsibility. But, after all, it was Jacques's life and Jacques's honour which were at stake. Therefore, it was for him alone to decide the basis of his defence. If counsel controlled his judgment too forcibly, he would have a right to say thereafter:—"Why did you not leave me free to choose? I should not have been condemned." M. Folgat had this fact in mind. Hence he spoke once more:—"The advice I give you, my dear client, is, in my eyes, the best; it is the advice I would give my own brother. But, unfortunately, I cannot say it is infallible. You must decide yourself. Whatever you may resolve, I am still at your service."

Jacques made no reply. His elbows resting on the table, his face in his hands, he remained motionless, absorbed in thought. What should he do? Should he follow his first impulse, tear the veil aside, and proclaim the truth? That was a doubtful policy, but, also, what a triumph if he succeeded! Should he adopt the views of his counsel, employ subterfuges and falsehoods? That was more certain of success; but to be successful in this way—was that a real victory? Jacques was in a terrible perplexity. The decision he formed would decide his fate. Suddenly he raised his head, and asked, "What is your advice, M. Magloire?"

The great advocate of Sauveterre looked grave. "I have had the honour to place before your mother all that my young colleague has just told you," he said somewhat curtly. "M. Folgat has but one fault,—he is too cautious. The physician must not ask his patient what he thinks of his remedies: he must prescribe them. It may be that our prescriptions do not meet with success; but, if you do not follow them, you are most assuredly lost."

Jacques hesitated for some minutes longer. These prescriptions, as M. Magloire called them, were painfully repugnant to his chivalrous and open character. "Would it be worth while," he murmured, "to be acquitted on such terms? Should I really be exculpated by such proceedings? Would not my after life be disgraced by unjust suspicions? I should not come out from the trial with a clear acquittal: I should have escaped by a mere chance."

"That would still be better than to go, by a clear judgment, to the galleys," said M. Magloire brutally.

This word, "galleys," made Jacques bound. He rose, took several strides up and down his cell, and then, stopping short in front of his two advocates, exclaimed,—“I put myself in your hands, gentlemen. Tell me what I must do.” Jacques had at least this merit—if he once formed a resolution, he was sure to adhere to it. Calm now, and self-possessed, he sat down, and said, with a melancholy smile,—“Let us hear the plan of battle.”

This plan had been for well-nigh a month M. Folgat's one great thought. All his intelligence, all his sagacity and knowledge of the world, had been brought to bear upon this case, which he had made his own, so to say, by the almost passionate interest he felt in it. He knew the tactics of the prosecution as well as M. Galpin-Daveline himself, and he knew its weak and its strong side even better than the investigating magistrate. "We shall proceed," he began, "as if no such person as the Countess de Claudieuse existed. We know nothing of her. We shall say nothing of the meeting at Valpinson, nor of the burnt letters. That being so, we must next look, not for the manner in which we spent our time, but for our purpose in going out the evening of the crime. Ah! If we could only suggest a plausible, a probable purpose, I should almost guarantee our success; for this is the turning-point of the entire case, on which all the discussion will take place"

Jacques did not seem to be fully convinced of this fact. "You think it will be so," he said.

"Unfortunately, it is but too certain; and, if I say unfortunately, it is because here we have to meet a formidable argument, the most decisive, in all respects, that has been raised, one on which M. Galpin has not insisted (he

is much too clever for that), but one which, in the hands of the prosecution, may become a terrible weapon."

"I must confess," said Jacques, "I do not very well see—"

"Have you forgotten the letter you wrote to Mademoiselle Denise the evening of the crime?" broke in M. Magloire.

Jacques looked first at one, and then at the other of his counsel. "What," he said, "that letter?"

"Overwhelms us, my dear client," rejoined M. Folgat. "Don't you remember it? In that note you told your betrothed that you would be prevented from spending the evening with her owing to business of the greatest importance, which could not be delayed? Thus, you see, you had predetermined, after mature consideration, to spend that evening in doing a certain thing. What was it? The prosecution says that this important business was to 'murder the Count de Claudieuse.' Now what can we say? Mademoiselle Denise has not handed your letter to the prosecution, but the latter is aware of its existence. M. de Chandore and M. Seneschal have spoken of it in the hope of exculpating you, and have even mentioned its contents. And M. Galpin knows it so well, that he has repeatedly mentioned it to you, and you have confessed all that he could desire." So saying, the young advocate looked among his papers; and referring to the reports of Jacques's examinations by the investigating magistrate, speedily showed him that such was the case.

Jacques was dumbfounded. But all prisoners are equally surprised when they are told of what they have stated in their examinations. There is not one who does not exclaim,—*"What, I said that? Never!"* And yet he *has* said it, and there is no denying it; for there it is written, and its authenticity is guaranteed by the culprit's own signature.

Such now proved the case with Jacques. The questions referring to the note he had written to Denise, and the "important business" he had had to transact on the night of the crime had been put to him so skilfully, and at such long intervals of time, that he had totally forgotten them; and yet now, when he recalled his answers, he had to acknowledge that he had confessed his purpose to devote that evening to a matter of great importance. "This

is fearful!" he cried. And overcome by the terrible reality of M. Folgat's apprehension, he added,—“How can we get out of it?”

“I told you,” replied M. Folgat, “we must find some plausible explanation.”

“I am sure I am incapable of that.”

The young lawyer seemed to reflect a moment, and then remarked,—“You have been a prisoner while I have been free. For a month now I have thought that matter over. Tell me where was your wedding to be?”

“At my house at Boiscoran.”

“Where was the religious ceremony to take place?”

“At the church at Brechy.”

“Have you ever spoken about it to the priest?”

“Several times. One day especially, when we discussed the matter in a pleasant way, he said jestingly to me, ‘I shall have you, after all, in my confessional.’”

M. Folgat almost trembled with satisfaction, and Jacques saw it. “Then the priest at Brechy was your friend?”

“An intimate friend. He sometimes came to dine with me without any ceremony, and I never passed him without shaking hands with him.”

The young lawyer's joy sparkled in his eyes:—“Well,” he said, “my explanation is growing quite plausible. Just hear what I have positively ascertained for a fact. From nine to eleven o'clock, on the night of the crime, there was not a soul at the parsonage at Brechy. The priest was dining with M. Besson, at his house; and his servant had gone out to meet him with a lantern. Now why should you not have gone to see the priest at Brechy, my dear client? In the first place, you had to arrange the details of the ceremony with him; then, as he is your friend, and a man of experience, and a priest, you wanted to ask him for his advice before taking so grave a step, and, finally, you intended to fulfil the religious duty of which he had spoken, and which you were rather reluctant to comply with.”

“Well said!” observed the eminent lawyer of Sauveterre approvingly,—“very well said!”

“So, you see, my dear client,” continued M. Folgat, “it was for the purpose of consulting the priest at Brechy that you deprived yourself of the pleasure of spending the evening with your betrothed. Now let us see how that

answers the allegations of the prosecution. They ask you why you took to the marshes. Why? Because it was the shortest way, and you were afraid of finding the priest in bed. Nothing more natural; for it is well known that the good man is in the habit of going to bed at nine o'clock. Still you had put yourself out in vain; for, when you knocked at the door of the parsonage, nobody came to open it."

Here M. Magloire interrupted his colleague, saying,—
"So far, all is very well. But now there comes a very great improbability. No one would think of going through the forest of Rochepommier in order to return from Brechy to Boiscoran. If you knew the country—"

"I know it; for I have carefully explored it. And the proof of it is, that, having foreseen the objection, I have found an answer. While M. de Boiscoran knocked at the door, a little peasant-girl passed by, and told him that she had just met the priest at a spot called the *Ca-fourche des Marechaux*. As the parsonage stands quite isolated, at the end of the village, such an incident is probable. As for the priest, chance led me to learn this: precisely at the hour when M. de Boiscoran would have been at Brechy, a priest passed by the spot I have mentioned: and this priest, whom I have seen, belongs to the next parish. He also dined at M. Besson's, and had just been sent for to attend a dying woman. The little girl, therefore, did not tell a story: she only made a mistake."

"Excellent!" said M. Magloire.

"Still," continued M. Folgat, "after this information, what did M. de Boiscoran do? He followed the wood; and hoping every moment to meet the priest, he walked as far as the forest of Rochepommier. Finding, at last, that the peasant-girl had—purposely or not—led him astray, he determined to return to Boiscoran through the woods. But he was in a very bad humour at having thus lost an evening which he might have spent with his betrothed: and this made him swear and curse, as the witness Gaudry has testified."

The famous lawyer of Sauveterre shook his head. "That is ingenious, I admit; and I confess, in all humility, that I could not have suggested any thing as good. But—for there is a 'but'—your story sins by its very

simplicity. The prosecution will say, 'If that is the truth, why did not M. de Boiscoran say so at once? what need was there for him to consult his counsel?'

M. Folgat's expression indicated that he was making a great effort to meet this objection. After a while, he replied,—“I know but too well that that is the weak point,—and a very weak point too; for it is quite clear, that, if M. de Boiscoran had given this explanation on the day of his arrest, he would have been released instantly. But what better can be found? What else can be found? However, this is only a rough sketch of my plan, and I have never put it into words till now. With your assistance, M. Magloire, and with the aid of Mechinet, to whom I am already indebted for very valuable information, with the aid of all our friends, in fine, I cannot help hoping that I may be able to improve my plan by adding some mysterious secret which may help to explain M. de Boiscoran's reticence. I thought, at one time, of calling in politics, and of pretending that, on account of the peculiar views of which he is suspected, M. de Boiscoran preferred keeping his connection with the priest at Brechy a secret.”

“Oh that would have been most unfortunate!” broke in M. Magloire. “We are not only religious at Sauveterre, we are devout, my good colleague,—excessively devout.”

“And I have given up that idea.”

Jacques, who had hitherto kept silent and motionless, now suddenly raised himself to his full height, and cried, in a voice of suppressed indignation, “Is it not too bad, is it not atrocious, that we should be compelled to concoct a falsehood! And I am innocent! What more could be done if I were a murderer?”

He was perfectly right: it was monstrous that he should be absolutely forced to conceal the truth. But his counsel took no notice of his indignation: they were too deeply absorbed in minutely examining their system of defence.

“Let us go on to the other points of the accusation,” said M. Magloire.

“If my version is accepted,” replied M. Folgat, “the rest follows as a matter of course. But will they accept it? On the day he was arrested, M. de Boiscoran, trying to find an excuse for having been out that night, said he had gone to see his wood-merchant at Brechy. That was

a disastrous imprudence. And here is the true danger; for the rest amounts to nothing. There is the water in which M. de Boiscoran washed his hands when he came home, and in which they have found traces of burnt paper. We have only to modify the facts very slightly to explain the circumstance. We have but to state what M. de Boiscoran really did, with a slight change in the motive. M. de Boiscoran is a passionate smoker: that is well-known. He had taken with him a good supply of cigarettes when he set out for Brechy; but he had no matches. And that is a fact. We can furnish proof, we can produce witnesses, that we had no matches; for we had forgotten our match-box, the day before, at M. de Chandore's—the box which we always carry about us, which everybody knows, and which is still lying on the mantel-piece in Mademoiselle Denise's little boudoir. Well, having no matches we found that we could go no farther without a smoke. We had gone some distance; and it was a question whether we should go on without smoking or return? No need of either! There was our gun; and we knew very well what sportsmen do under such circumstances. We took the shot out of one of our cartridges, and, in setting the powder on fire, we lighted a piece of paper. This is an operation in which you cannot help blackening your fingers. As we had to repeat it several times, our hands became very much soiled and very black, and our finger nails were full of little fragments of burnt paper."

"Ah! now you are right," exclaimed M. Magloire. "Well done!"

His young colleague became more and more animated; and always employing the professional "we," which his brethren affect, he continued,—“This water, which you dwell upon so much, is the clearest evidence of our innocence. If we had been an incendiary, we should certainly have poured it away as hurriedly as the murderer tries to wash out the blood-stains which betray him. The charge would have the same weight. Why refer to our letter to Mademoiselle Denise? we should ask. Because you pretend it proves our premeditation? Ah! there I hold you. Are we really so stupid, so bereft of common sense? That is not our reputation. What! we premeditate a crime, and ignore the fact that we shall certainly be convicted unless we prepare an *alibi*! Again: What! we

leave home with the fixed purpose of killing a man, and we load our gun with small shot! Really, you make the defence too easy; for your charges will not stand the test of being examined."

It was Jacques's turn this time to testify his approbation. "That is what I have told Galpin over and over again," he said. "And he never had anything to say in reply. We must insist on that point."

M. Folgat was consulting his notes. "I now come to a very important circumstance," he resumed, "and one which, at the trial, I should make a decisive question, if it should be favourable to our side. Your valet, my dear client,—your old Anthony—told me that he cleaned and washed your breech-loader the night before the crime."

"Good heavens!" exclaimed Jacques.

"Well, I see you appreciate the importance of the fact. Did you fire your gun between that cleaning and the time when you set the cartridge on fire, in order to burn the Countess de Claudieuse's letters? If you did, we must say nothing more about it. If you did not, one of the barrels of the breech-loader must be clean, and then you are safe."

For more than a minute Jacques remained silent, trying to recall the facts; at last he replied, "It seems to me certain that I fired at a rabbit on the morning of that fatal day."

M. Magloire looked disappointed. "Fate again!" he said.

"Oh, wait!" cried Jacques. "I am quite sure, at all events, that I killed that rabbit at the first shot. Consequently, I can have only fouled one barrel of the gun. If I used the same barrel at Valpinson, to get a light, I am safe. With a double gun, one almost instinctively uses the right-hand barrel first."

M. Magloire's face grew darker. "Never mind," he said, "we cannot possibly make an argument upon such an uncertain chance—a chance, which, in case of error, would almost fatally turn against us. But at the trial, when they show you the gun, examine it, and tell me how that matter stands."

Thus they had sketched the outlines of their plan of defence. There remained nothing now but to perfect the details; and to this task the two lawyers were still devoted.

ing themselves when Blangin, the jailer, called to them through the wicket, that the prison doors were about to be closed.

"Five minutes more, my good Blangin!" cried Jacques. And drawing his two friends aside, as far from the wicket as he could, he said to them in a low and distressed voice, "A thought has occurred to me, gentlemen, which I think I ought to mention to you. I am sure that the Countess de Claudieuse must be suffering terribly since I am in prison. However certain she may be that she has left no traces behind her that could betray her, still she must tremble at the idea that I may, after all, tell the truth in self defence. She would deny it, I know; for she is doubtless confident that she is so sure of her prestige, that my accusations would not injure her marvellous reputation. Nevertheless, she cannot but shrink from the scandal. Who knows if she might not furnish us with the means to escape from the trial, so as to avoid this exposure? Could not one of you gentlemen make an attempt to influence her?"

M. Folgat was a man of quick resolution. "I will try," he answered, "if you will give me a line of introduction." Jacques immediately sat down, and wrote as follows:—

"I have told my counsel, M. Folgat, everything. Save me, and I swear to you eternal silence. Will you let me perish, Genevieve, when you know I am innocent?"

"JACQUES."

"Is that enough?" he asked, handing the lawyer the note.

"Yes; and I promise you I will see the Countess de Claudieuse within the next forty-eight hours."

Blangin was already growing impatient; and the two advocates had to leave the prison without further delay. As they crossed the place du Marche Neuf they noticed a number of boys and girls following a wandering musician, who, strumming on a wretched fiddle, sang, with all the local accent, an old ballad of Saintonge:—

"In the spring, mother Redbreast
In the bushes made her nest,
The good lady!
In the bushes made her nest,
The good lady!"

Instinctively M. Folgat fumbled in his pocket for some sous, when the musician came up to him, held out his hat as if to ask for alms, and whispered, "You do not recognise me?"

The advocate started. "You here!" he said.

"Yes, I myself. I came this morning, I was watching for you; for I must see you this evening at nine o'clock. Let me in by the little garden-gate at the back of M. de Chandore's house." Then, taking up his fiddle again, the minstrel wandered off listlessly, singing as he went:—

"And a few, a few weeks later,
She had a wee, a wee bit birdy."

XXIII.

THE great lawyer of Sauveterre had been far more astonished than M. Folgat at this unexpected and extraordinary meeting. As soon as the wandering minstrel had left them, he said to his young colleague, "You know that individual?"

"That individual," replied M. Folgat, "is none other than the agent whose services I have engaged, and whom I mentioned to you."

"Goudar?"

"Yes, Goudar."

"And you did not recognise him?"

The young advocate smiled. "Not until he spoke," he replied. "The Goudar whom I know is tall, thin, beardless, and wears his hair cut like a brush. This street-musician is short, full bearded, and his long, smooth hair falls over his shoulders. How could I recognise my man in that vagabond costume, with a violin in his hand, and a provincial song set to music?"

M. Magloire smiled too as he said, "After all, what are professional actors in comparison with these men! Here is one who pretends having reached Sauveterre only this morning, and who knows the country as well as Frumence Cheminot himself. He has not been here twelve hours, and he speaks already of M. de Chandore's little garden-gate."

"Oh! I can explain that circumstance now, although,

at first, it surprised me very much. When I told Goudar the whole story, I no doubt mentioned the little gate in connection with Mechinet."

While chatting they had reached the upper end of the Rue Nationale. Here they stopped having different roads to take to return home. Before separating, M. Magloire inquired of his colleague if he were quite resolved to see the Countess de Claudieuse; and on receiving an affirmative reply he advised him to be very prudent, no matter what might happen. "Above all," he added, "do not lose your temper. Remember that a scene with her would compel us to change our whole line of defence, and that that is the only one which promises any success."

"Oh, do not fear!" replied M. Folgat, and then, having shaken hands once more, they parted.

On reaching the Baron de Chandore's residence, M. Folgat found every one waiting for him in the drawing-room. He was surprised to see how mournful and dejected all the prisoner's relatives and friends appeared to be. "Have we any bad news?" he asked with a hesitating voice.

"The worst we had to fear," replied the Marquis de Boiscoran. "We had all foreseen it; and still, as you see, it has surprised us like a clap of thunder. In a word, the court has ordered the trial!"

"It is still a great secret," added Denise; "and we only know it, thanks to the indiscretion of kind, devoted Mechinet. Jacques will have to appear before the assizes."

At this moment she was interrupted by a servant, who entered to announce that dinner was on the table. They went into the dining-room; but, under such circumstances, none of them had any appetite to eat, and, with the exception of Denise and M. Folgat, no one seemed inclined to talk. From Mademoiselle de Chandore the young advocate learned that the Count de Claudieuse was decidedly worse, and that he would have received the last sacraments that very day had it not been for Dr. Seignebos's decided opposition; for the physician had declared that the slightest excitement might kill his patient. "And if he dies," added M. de Chandore, "that is the finishing stroke. Public opinion, already incensed against Jacques, will become implacable."

However, the meal came to an end; and M. Folgat then

immediately acquainted Denise with Goudar's arrival and requested her to give him the key of the little garden-gate. Nine o'clock was just striking when the spurious minstrel was heard approaching down the lane; M. Folgat at once set the door ajar, and a minute later Goudar, still carrying his violin, slipped into the garden. "A day lost!" he exclaimed, without thinking of saluting the young lawyer,—“a whole day; for I could do nothing till I had seen you.”

He seemed so angry that M. Folgat tried to sooth him by complimenting him on his disguise. On this occasion, however, Goudar was not open to praise. "What would a detective be worth," he replied, "if he could not disguise himself! A great merit, forsooth! And I tell you, I hate it! But I could not think of coming to Sauveterre as a detective. Ugh! Everybody would have run away; and what a pack of lies they would have told me! So I had to act that hideous masquerade. To think that I once took six months' lessons from a music-teacher merely to fit myself for the character! A wandering musician, you see, can go anywhere, and nobody is surprised; he goes about the streets, or he travels along the high-road; he enters yards, and slips into houses; he begs for alms: and in so doing, he accosts everybody, speaks to them, follows them. And as for my precious dialect, you must know I was here once before, engaged during six months in hunting after a gang of coiners; and if you don't catch a provincial accent in six months, you don't deserve to belong to the police. And I do belong to it, to my wife's great distress and my own disgust."

"If your ambition is really what you say, my dear Goudar," said M. Folgat, interrupting him, "you may be able to leave your profession very soon—if you succeed in saving M. de Boiscoran, he will give you his house in the Rue des Vignes with all his heart?"

The detective looked up. "That house in the Rue des Vignes," he ejaculated, "that little paradise! An immense garden, a soil of marvellous fertility! And what an aspect! There are walls there on which I could raise finer peaches than they have at Montreuil, and richer chasselas grapes than those of Fontainebleau!"

"Did you find anything there?" asked M. Folgat.

Goudar, thus recalled to business, became serious again.

"Nothing at all," he replied. "Nor did I learn anything from the tradesmen. I am no farther advanced than I was the first day."

"Let us hope you will have more luck here."

"I hope so; but I need your assistance to commence operations. I must see Dr. Seignebos, and Mechinet the clerk! Ask them to meet me at the place I shall assign in a note which I will send them. On the other hand, if you want my *incognito* to be respected, you must get a permit from the mayor, for Goudar, street musician, to go about the town, I keep my own name, because here nobody knows me. But I must have that permit this evening. Wherever I might present myself, asking for a bed, they would call for my papers."

"Wait here for a quarter of an hour, there is a bench," said M. Folgat, "and I'll go at once to the mayor." And in fact a quarter of an hour later, Goudar had his permit in his pocket, and went to take lodgings at the "Mouton Rouge," the worst tavern in all Sauveterre.

When a painful unavoidable duty has to be performed, a man's real character is apt to appear in its true light. Some people postpone the task before them as long as they can, like those pious persons who keep the biggest sin for the end of their confession: others, on the contrary, are in a hurry to be relieved of their anxiety, and make an end of it as soon as possible. M. Folgat belonged to this latter class. When he awoke the next morning, he instantly resolved to call upon the Countess de Claudieuse that very day. At eight o'clock he left the house, dressed more carefully than usual, and told the servant that he did not wish to be waited for, if he should not be back at breakfast-time. He went first to the Palais de Justice, where he found Mechinet the clerk already hard at work, writing with the feverish haste of a man who has to pay for a piece of property he wants to call his own. Seeing M. Folgat enter, he rose, and asked him if he had heard the decision of the court concerning the order for the trial. The advocate replied affirmatively, adding that he was not surprised. He next asked what was the opinion current in the judicial world, to which Mechinet rejoined that every one expected a condemnation. Lowering his voice, M. Folgat then acquainted the clerk with Goudar's arrival and the latter's desire for an interview. Mechinet at once agreed

to meet the detective wherever the latter might appoint; and the advocate, having accomplished his mission, turned to leave, saying as he did so:—"One more suggestion. Goudar desires to remain unknown. Do not speak of him to any living soul, and especially show no surprise at the costume in which you will see him."

M. Folgat's next visit was to Dr. Seignebois. To his intense surprise he learnt that the latter had already seen Goudar. Indeed the detective had grown so tired of losing his time in his garret at the Mouton Rouge, that it occurred to him to pretend illness, and send for the doctor. The latter, on his arrival, found himself in face of a street minstrel who seemed to be in the enjoyment of perfect health, and he was at a loss to know in what way his services were required, when Goudar suddenly revealed himself, asked for the doctor's opinion concerning the Boiscoran case and imparted his own ideas. "Then there is an end of that matter," said M. Folgat, when Dr. Seignebois had given him this information. "But now let me speak to you of another affair. M. de Boiscoran has charged me with a message for the Countess de Claudieuse."

"The deuce!"

"I must try to obtain from her the means for our acquittal."

"Do you expect she will provide it?"

M. Folgat could hardly retain an impatient gesture. "I have accepted the mission," he said dryly, "and I mean to carry it out."

"I understand, my dear sir. But you will not see the countess. The count is very ill. She does not leave his bedside, and does not even receive her most intimate friends."

"And still I must see her. I must at any hazard give her a note which my client has confided to me. And look here, doctor, I mean to be frank with you. It was exactly because I foresaw there would be difficulties, that I came to ask your assistance in overcoming or avoiding them."

"Why come to me?"

"Are you not the count's physician?"

"Ten thousand devils!" cried Dr. Seignebois. "You do not mince matters, you lawyers!" And then speaking in a lower tone, and replying apparently to his own objec

tions rather than to M. Folgat, he added,—“Certainly, I attend the Count de Claudieuse, whose illness, by the way, upsets all my theories, and defies all my experience : but for that very reason I can do nothing. Our profession has certain rules which cannot be infringed without compromising the whole medical world.”

“But it is a question of life and death for Jacques, who is your friend !”

“And a fellow Republican, moreover. But I cannot help you without abusing the confidence of the Countess de Claudieuse.”

“Ah, sir ! Has not that woman committed a crime for which M. de Boiscoran, though innocent, will be arraigned in court ?”

“I think so ; but still”—The doctor paused, reflected a moment, and then suddenly snatched up his broad-brimmed hat, drew it over his head, and cried,—“After all so much the worse for her ! There are sacred interests which claim priority. Come !”

XXIV.

THE Count de Claudieuse and his wife had installed themselves, on the day after the fire, in a handsome house standing in the Rue Mautrec, which M. Seneschal, the mayor, had succeeded in renting for them. For more than a century it had been in the possession of the De Juliac family, and is still considered one of the finest and most magnificent mansions in Sauveterre. In less than ten minutes Dr. Seignebois and M. Folgat were there. From the street, nothing was visible but a tall wall of great antiquity, overgrown with parasitic plants and fringed above with wild flowers. Entering by a huge gateway pierced in the wall, you cross a large garden, in which a dozen statues, covered with green moss, are falling to pieces on their pedestals, under the shade of some magnificent old limes. The house has only two stories. From the large vestibule which extends from end to end of the ground floor, a wide staircase with stone steps and a superb wrought iron railing leads up stairs. Dr. Seignebois and M. Folgat passed through the garden, mounted the steps, and entered the hall. Here the doctor opened

a door on the right hand. "Step in here and wait," he said to M. Folgat. "I will go up stairs and see the count, whose room is on the next floor, and I will send you the countess."

The young advocate did as he was told, and found himself in a large room, lighted by three tall windows looking out upon the garden. This room must once have been superb. The panelled walls were painted white, with gilt mouldings and arabesques, while on the ceiling there appeared a vast allegorical composition representing a number of fat little angels sporting in a sky dotted with golden stars. Time had, however, half effaced the colours, and tarnished the gilding, while on the other hand the appointments of the chamber were altogether in a dilapidated condition. The windows had no curtains. On the mantelpiece stood a worn-out clock, flanked by a pair of half broken candelabras; and here and there about the room stood various pieces of furniture, which had been rescued from the fire at Valpinson,—chairs, sofas, arm-chairs, and a round table, more or less scorched and blackened by the flames.

M. Folgat paid little attention, however, to these details. He only thought of the grave step on which he was venturing, the extreme boldness of which he now realized for the first time. Thoughts of retreat had entered his head when he suddenly heard a light, rapid step in the hall. Almost immediately afterward the Countess de Claudieuse entered. He recognised her at once, thanks to Jacques's description. Far from diminishing her exquisite beauty, the terrible events of the last months seemed, as it were, to have hallowed her charms. Perhaps she had grown rather thin, and the dark semicircle under her eyes, and the disorder of her hair certainly betrayed the fatigue and the anxiety of long nights spent by her husband's bedside. As M. Folgat bowed, she asked him,—“You are M. de Boiscoran's counsel?”

“Yes, madam,” replied the young advocate.

“The doctor tells me you wish to speak to me.”

“Yes, madame.”

With a queenly air, she pointed to a chair, and, sitting down herself, added,—“I am listening, sir.”

M. Folgat began with beating heart, but in a firm voice,—

"I ought, first of all, madame, to state to you my client's true position."

"That is useless, sir. I know it."

"You know, madame, that he has been summoned for trial and that he may be condemned?"

She shook her head with a painful gesture, and replied softly,—*"I know, sir, that the Count de Claudieuse has been the victim of a most infamous attempt at murder; that he is still in danger, and that, unless God works a miracle, I shall soon be without a husband, and my children without a father."*

"But M. de Boiscoran is innocent, madame."

The features of the countess assumed an expression of profound surprise. *"And who, then, is the murderer?"* she said, looking fixedly at M. Folgat.

Ah! It cost the young advocate no small effort to prevent his lips from uttering the fatal *"You"* prompted by his indignant conscience. But he had to think of the success of his mission; and, instead of replying, he said,—*"To a prisoner, madame, to an unfortunate man on the eve of judgment, an advocate is a confessor, to whom he tells everything. I must add that the counsel of the accused is like a priest; he must forget the secrets confided to him."*

"I do not understand you, sir."

"My client, madame, had a very simple means of proving his innocence. He had only to tell the truth. He has preferred risking his own honour, rather than to betray another person's honour."

The countess looked impatient. *"My moments are limited, sir,"* she exclaimed hastily. *"May I beg you to be more explicit?"*

But M. Folgat had gone as far as he well could go. *"Madame,"* he said, *"I am desired by M. de Boiscoran to hand you a letter."*

The Countess de Claudieuse seemed to be overwhelmed with surprise. *"A letter to me?"* she said. *"On what ground?"*

Without adding a word, M. Folgat drew Jacques's letter from his pocketbook, and gave it to her. *"Here it is!"* he said.

She took it with a perfectly steady hand, and opened it slowly. But, as soon as she had run her eye over it, she

rose, her face turned crimson, and, with flaming eyes, she cried,—“Do you know, sir, what this letter contains?”

“Yes.”

“Do you know that M. de Boiscoran dares to call me by my christain name, Genevieve, as my husband and my father do!”

The decisive moment had now come. M. Folgat had retained all his self-possession. “M. de Boiscoran,” said he, “claims that he used to call you so in former days,—in the Rue des Vignes—in days when you called him Jacques.”

The countess seemed utterly bewildered. “But that is sheer infamy, sir,” she stammered. “What! M. de Boiscoran should have dared to tell you that I, the Countess de Claudieuse, was his—mistress?”

“He certainly said so, madame; and he affirms, that a few moments before the fire broke out, he was near you, and that, if his hands were blackened, it was because he had burned your letters and his.”

She rose at these words, and in a penetrating voice replied,—“And you could believe that,—you? Ah! M. de Boiscoran’s other crimes are nothing in comparison with this? He is not satisfied with having burnt our house, with having ruined us: he means to dishonour us as well. He is not satisfied with having nearly murdered my husband: he must ruin the honour of his wife also.”

She spoke so loud, that her voice must have been distinctly heard in the vestibule. “Lower, madame, I pray you speak lower,” said M. Folgat.

She cast upon him a withering glance; and, raising her voice still higher, she went on,—“Yes, I understand very well that you are afraid of being heard. But I—what have I to fear? I could wish the whole world to hear us, and to judge between us. Lower, you say? Why should I speak less loud? Do you think that if the Count de Claudieuse were not on his death-bed, this letter would not have long since been in his hands? Ah, *he* would soon obtain satisfaction for such an infamous letter. But I am a poor woman, and the world thinks that my husband is lost already. I am alone without a protector, without a friend.”

“But, madame, M. de Boiscoran pledges himself to the most perfect secrecy.”

“Secrecy! what secrecy? For your cowardly insults,

your abominable plots, of which this, no doubt, is but a beginning?"

M. Folgat turned livid under this insult. "Ah, take care, madame," he said in a hoarse tone of voice: "we have proof, absolute, overwhelming proof."

The countess stopped him with an imperious gesture, and then with the haughtiest disdain replied,—“Well, then, produce your proof. Go, hasten, act as you like. We shall see if the vile calumnies of an incendiary can stain an honest woman's pure reputation. We shall see if a single speck of the mire in which you wallow can reach me.” And, throwing Jacques's letter at M. Folgat's feet, she went towards the door.

“Madame,” said M. Folgat once more,—“madame!” But she did not even condescend to turn round: she disappeared, leaving him standing in the middle of the room, so overcome with amazement, that he could not collect his thoughts. Fortunately Dr. Seignebos came in.

“Upon my word!” he said, “I never thought the countess would take my treachery so coolly. When she came out from you just now, she asked me, in the same tone as usual, how I had found her husband, and what was to be done. I told her—” The rest of the sentence remained unspoken, for the doctor had become aware of M. Folgat's utter consternation. “Why, what on earth is the matter?” he asked.

The young advocate looked at him with an utterly bewildered air. “This is the matter: I ask myself whether I am awake or dreaming. This is the matter; that, if this woman is guilty, she possesses an audacity beyond all belief.”

“How, if? Have you changed your mind about her guilt?”

M. Folgat looked altogether disheartened. “Ah!” he said, “I hardly know myself. Do you not see that I have lost my head, that I do not know what to think, and what to believe? And yet, doctor, I am not a simpleton. I have now been pleading five years in criminal courts: I have had to dive down into the lowest depths of society; I have seen strange things, met with exceptional specimens of human nature, and heard fabulous stories—”

It was the doctor's turn, now, to be amazed; and he

actually forgot to trouble his gold spectacles. "Why? What did the countess say?" he asked.

"I might tell you every word," replied M. Folgat, "and you would be none the wiser. You ought to have been here, and seen her and heard her! What a woman! Not a muscle in her face moved; her eye remained limpid and clear; there was no emotion in her voice. And with what an air she defied me! But come, doctor, let us go!"

They went out, and were already a third of the way down the long garden avenue, when they saw the countess's elder daughter coming towards them, on her way to the house, accompanied by her governess. Dr. Seignebos stopped, and pressing the young advocate's arm, he whispered into his ear,—“Mind! say nothing. You know that truth comes out of children's mouths.”

“What do you expect?” murmured M. Folgat.

“To settle a doubtful point. Hush! Let me manage it.”

By this time the little girl had reached them. She was a graceful child, eight or nine years old, light haired, with large blue eyes, tall for her age, and evidently intelligent. “How are you, my little Martha?” said the doctor in his gentlest voice.

“Good morning, gentlemen!” she replied with a nice little courtesy.

Dr. Seignebos bent down to kiss her rosy cheeks, and then, looking at her, he said,—“You look sad, Martha?”

“Yes, because papa and little sister are ill,” she replied with a deep sigh.

“And also because you miss Valpinson?”

“Oh, yes!”

“Still it is very pretty here, and you have a large garden to play in.”

She shook her head, and, lowering her voice, replied,—“It is certainly very pretty here; but—I am afraid.”

“Afraid of what, my little one?”

She pointed to the statues, and shuddering, replied,—“In the evening, when it grows dark, I fancy they are moving. I think I see people hiding behind the trees, like the man who wanted to kill papa.”

“You ought to drive away those ugly notions, Mademoiselle Martha,” said M. Folgat.

But Dr. Seignebos did not allow him to go on. “What

Martha?" he said, "I did not know you were so timid. I thought, on the contrary, you were very brave. Your papa told me that on the night of the fire you were not afraid of anything."

"Papa was right."

"And yet, when you were aroused by the flames, it must have been terrible."

"Oh! it was not the flames that woke me, doctor."

"Still the fire had broken out."

"I was not asleep, doctor. I woke when mamma slammed the bedroom door as she came in."

One and the same presentiment made M. Folgat and the doctor tremble. "You must be mistaken, Martha," said the practitioner. "Your mamma had not gone out at the time of the fire."

"Oh, yes, sir!"

"No, you are mistaken."

The little girl drew herself up with that solemn air which children are apt to assume when their statements are doubted. "I am quite sure of what I say," she replied, "and I remember everything perfectly. I had been put to bed at the usual hour, and, as I was very tired with playing, I fell asleep at once. While I was asleep, mamma had gone out; but her coming back woke me up. As soon as she came in, she bent over little sister's bed, and looked at her for a moment so sadly, that I thought I should cry. Then she went, and sat down by the window; and from my bed, where I lay watching her, I saw the tears running down her cheeks, when all of a sudden a shot was fired."

M. Folgat and Dr. Seignebos looked anxiously at each other. "Then, my little one," insisted Dr. Seignebos, "you are quite sure your mamma was in your room when the first shot was fired?"

"Certainly, doctor. And mamma, when she heard it, rose up straight, and lowered her head, like one who listens. Almost immediately afterwards, the second shot was fired, and mamma raised her hands to heaven, and cried, 'Great God!' And then she went out very quickly."

"You have dreamed all that, Martha," said, Dr. Seignebos.

"But the governess here interposed. 'The young lady did not dream it,' she said. 'I, also, heard the shots fired,

and I had just opened the door of my room to know what was going on, when I saw madame cross the landing swiftly, and rush down stairs."

"Oh! I do not doubt it," said the doctor, in the most indifferent tone he could assume, "the circumstance is very unimportant."

But the little girl was bent upon finishing her story. "When mamma left," she continued, "I was very frightened, and sat up in bed to listen. Soon I heard a noise I did not know,—cracking and snapping of wood, and then cries at a distance. I got more frightened, jumped out of bed, and ran to open the door. But I nearly fell down, there was such a cloud of smoke and sparks. Still I did not lose my head. I woke my little sister, and tried to get on to the staircase, when Cocoleu rushed in like a madman, and took us both out."

"Martha," called a voice from the house, "Martha!"

The child stopped short at once. "Mamma is calling me," she said. And, dropping another little courtesy, she added,—*"Good-bye, gentlemen!"*

She had disappeared; and Dr. Seignebos and M. Folgat were still standing on the same spot, looking at each other in utter distress. "We have nothing more to do here," said M. Folgat.

"No, indeed! Let us make haste and get back; for perhaps they are waiting for me. You must breakfast with me."

They went away very much disheartened, and so absorbed in their defeat, that they forgot to return the salutations with which they were greeted in the street,—a circumstance carefully noticed by several watchful observers.

When the doctor reached home, he showed the advocate into his study, and asked,—*"And now what do you think of your adventure?"*

M. Folgat looked completely undone. "I cannot understand it," he murmured.

"Is it possible the countess could have schooled the child to say what she told us?"

"No."

"And her governess?"

"Still less. A woman of that character trusts nobody. She struggles; she triumphs or succumbs alone."

"Then the child and the governess have told us the truth?"

"I am convinced of that."

"So am I. Then she had no share in her husband's murder?"

"Alas!"

M. Folgat did notice that his "Alas!" was received by Dr. Seignebois with an air of triumph. The practitioner had taken off his spectacles, and, wiping them vigorously observed, "If the countess is innocent, Jacques must be guilty, you think? Jacques must have deceived us all then?"

M. Folgat shook his head. "I pray you, doctor, do not press me just now. Give me time to collect my thoughts. I am bewildered by all these conjectures. No, I am sure M. de Boiscoran has not told a falsehood. The countess has been his mistress. No, he has not deceived us; and on the night of the crime he really had an interview with the countess. Did not Martha tell us that her mother had gone out? And where could she have gone, if not to meet M. de Boiscoran?"

He paused a moment. "Oh, come, come!" said the physician, "you need not be afraid of me."

"Well it may be possible, that after the countess left M. de Boiscoran, Fate stepped in. Jacques has told us how the letters which he was burning suddenly blazed up, with such fury that he was alarmed. Who can tell whether some burning fragments may not have set a straw-rick on fire? You can judge yourself. On the point of leaving the place, M. de Boiscoran sees this fire ignited. He hastens to put it out. His efforts are unsuccessful. The fire increases step by step: it lights up the whole front of the chateau. At that moment the Count de Claudieuse comes out. Jacques thinks he has been watched and detected; he sees his marriage broken off, his life ruined, his happiness destroyed; he loses his head, aims, fires, and flies instantly. Thus one might explain his missing the count the first time, and also the fact, that the gun was loaded with small-shot a circumstance which seems to preclude the idea of premeditated murder."

"Good God!" cried the doctor.

"What, what have I said?"

"Take care never to repeat it! The suggestion you make is so fearfully plausible, that, if it becomes known, no one will ever believe you when you tell the real truth."

"The truth? Then you think I am mistaken?"

"Most assuredly," and fixing his spectacles on his nose, Dr. Seignebos added, "I never admitted that the countess had fired at her husband. I now see that I was right. She did not perpetrate the crime herself; but she instigated it."

"Oh!"

"She would not be the first woman who has acted in this manner. What I imagine is that the countess had made up her mind and arranged her plan, before meeting Jacques. The murderer was already at his post. If she had succeeded in winning Jacques back, her accomplice would have put away his gun, and quietly gone to bed. As she could not induce Jacques to give up his marriage, she made a sign, the fire was lighted, and the count was shot."

The young advocate did not seem fully convinced. "In that case, there would have been premeditation," he objected; "and how, then, came the gun to be loaded with small-shot?"

"The accomplice had not sense enough to know better."

Seeing the doctor's drift, M. Folgat started up,—*"What?"* he said, *"always Cocoleu?"*

Dr. Seignebos tapped his forehead with his finger, and replied, "When an idea has once made its way in there—there it remains fixed. Yes, the countess had an accomplice, and that accomplice was Cocoleu; and if he has no sense, you see the wretched idiot at least carries his devotion and discretion very far."

"If what you say is true, doctor, we shall never get the key of this affair; for Cocoleu will not confess."

"Don't swear to that. There is a way—" He paused, being interrupted by the sudden entrance of his servant who announced that there was a gendarme down stairs, with a man who ought to be sent to the hospital at once.

"Show them up," said the doctor. And, while the servant went to do his bidding, Dr. Seignebos added, "And here *is* the way. Now mind!"

A heavy step was heard shaking the stairs; and almost immediately afterwards a gendarme appeared, holding in one hand a violin, and with the other supporting an individual who seemed unable to walk alone.

"Goudar!" exclaimed M. Folgat, and Goudar it was.

but in what a state ! His clothes were muddy and torn, his face pale, his eyes haggard, his beard and lips covered with white foam.

"The story is this," said the gendarme. "This individual was playing his fiddle in the court-yard of the barracks and we were looking out of the window at him, when all of a sudden he fell on to the ground, rolled about, twisted and writhed, uttering fearful howls, and foaming like a mad dog. We picked him up ; and I bring him to you."

"Leave us alone with him," said the physician.

The gendarme went out ; and as soon as the door was shut, Goudar cried with a voice full of intense disgust,—
"What a profession ! Just look at me ! What a disgrace if my wife should see me in this state ! Phew !" And pulling a handkerchief from his pocket, he wiped his face and drew from his mouth a small piece of soap.

"But the point is," said the doctor, "that you have played the epileptic so well that the gendarmes have been taken in."

"A fine trick indeed, and very creditable."

"An excellent trick, since you can now safely go to the hospital. They will put you in the same ward with Cocoleu, and I shall come and see you every morning. You are free to act now."

"Never mind me," said the detective, "I have my plan." Then turning to M. Folgat, he added, "I am a prisoner now ; but I have taken my precautions. The agent whom I have sent to England will report to you. I have a favour to ask besides. I have written to my wife to send her letters to you : you can send them to me by the doctor. And now I am ready to become Cocoleu's companion, and to earn the house in the Rue des Vignes."

Having signed an order of admission, Dr. Seignebois recalled the gendarme ; and, after praising his compassion, asked him to take "the poor devil" to the hospital. When he was alone once more with M. Folgat, he said,—
"Now, my dear friend, let us consult. Shall we speak to any one of what little Martha told us, or of Goudar's plan ? I think not ; for M. Galpin Daveline is watching us ; and, if a mere suspicion of what is going on reaches the prosecution, all is lost. Let us content ourselves, then, with reporting your interview with the countess to Jacques. As for the rest, Silence !"

XXV.

LIKE all very clever men, Dr. Seignebois made the mistake of thinking other people as cunning as himself. M. Galpin-Daveline was, of course, watching him, but by no means with the attention which one would have expected from so ambitious a man. He had naturally been the first to receive notification that the case would be tried in open court. And from that moment he felt relieved of all anxiety. As for remorse he had none. There was nothing he regretted. He did not reflect that the prisoner had once been his friend,—a friend of whom he was proud, whose hospitality he had enjoyed, and whose favour he had eagerly sought in his matrimonial aspirations. No. He only saw one thing,—that he had engaged in a dangerous affair, on which his whole future depended, and that he was now going to win triumphantly.

Of course he was not relieved of all responsibility; but the zeal he had shown in preparing the case for trial was no longer requisite. He need not appear at the trial itself—and, whatever might be the result, he trusted that he should now always escape the blame, which would have certainly fallen on his shoulders if the accusation chamber, failing to support the conclusions of his report, had decided that there was not sufficient evidence for the case to go before the jury. He was aware that many people said he had betrayed his friend; that his social relations were well-nigh broken off, and that nobody shook hands with him heartily. But that gave him no concern. After all, what was Sauveterre?—a miserable little town of five thousand inhabitants! He hoped he should not remain there much longer, and that a brilliant preferment would repay him for his courage, and relieve him from all foolish reproaches. Besides, once in the large city to which he would be promoted, distance would attenuate and, perhaps, even efface the impression made by his conduct at Sauveterre. All that would be remembered, after a time, would be his reputation as one of those famous magistrates, who, according to the stereotyped phrase, “sacrifice everything to the sacred interests of justice, who set inflexible duty high above all the considerations that trouble and disturb the vulgar mind, and whose heart is like a rock, against which all human

passions are helplessly shattered." With such a reputation, with his knowledge of the world, and eagerness to succeed, opportunities would not be wanting to push himself forward, to make himself known, to become useful, indispensable even. He saw himself already on the highest steps of the official ladder—a judge at Bordeaux, at Lyons, or even in Paris itself!

With such rose-coloured dreams he fell asleep one night, and the next morning, as he walked along the streets, his bearing—haughtier and stiffer than ever—his firmly closed lips, and the cold and severe gleam in his eyes, told the curious observers that there must be something new. "M. de Boiscoran's case must be very bad indeed," they said, "or M. Galpin would not look so proud."

He went first to the private residence of the public prosecutor. The truth is, he was still smarting under M. Daubigeon's severe reproaches, and thought he would now enjoy his revenge. He found the old collector, as usual, among his beloved books, and in a worse humour than ever. Ignoring this circumstance, he handed him a number of papers to sign; and this business being over, he carefully replaced the documents in a large leather case with his monogram on the outside, remarking, with an air of indifference, "Well, my dear sir, you have heard the decision of the court? Which of us was right?"

M. Daubigeon shrugged his shoulders. "Of course I am nothing but an old fool, a maniac," he said angrily, "I give it up; and I say, like Horace's man,—

*'Stultum me fateor, liceat concedere veris
Atque etiam insanum.'*"

"You are joking. But what would have happened if I had listened to you?"

"I don't care to know."

"M. de Boiscoran would have been sent to a jury all the same."

"May be."

"Anybody else would have collected the proofs of his guilt just as well as I have done."

"That's a question."

"And if I had backed out of the affair I should have injured my reputation very seriously; for they would have

called me one of those timid magistrates who are frightened at a trifle."

"That is as good a reputation as some others," broke in the public prosecutor. He had vowed he would answer only in monosyllables; but his anger made him forget his resolution, and he added in a severe tone,—“Another man would not have been exclusively bent upon proving that M. de Boiscoran was guilty.”

“I certainly have proved it.”

“Another man would have tried to solve the mystery.”

“But I have solved it, I imagine.”

M. Daubigeon bowed ironically. “I congratulate you,” he said. ‘It must be delightful to know the secret of all things, *Felix qui potuit rerum cognoscere causas.*’ Only remember you may be mistaken. You are an excellent hand at such investigations; but I am an older man than you in the profession. The more I think of this case, the less I understand it. If you know everything so perfectly well, I wish you would tell me what could have been the motive for the crime, for, after all, we do not run the risk of losing our head without some very powerful tangible reason. What was Jacques’s reason? You will tell me he hated the Count de Claudieuse. But is that an answer? Come, dive for a moment into your own conscience,—But stop! No one likes to do that. *‘Nemo in se tentat descendere.’*”

M. Galpin was beginning to regret that he had ever come. He had hoped to find M. Daubigeon quite penitent, and here he was worse than ever.

“The accusation chamber has had no such scruples,” he said dryly.

“No; but the jury may feel some. They are, occasionally, men of sense.”

“The jury will condemn M. de Boiscoran without hesitation.”

“I would not swear to that.”

“You would if you knew who will plead for the prosecution.”

“Who?”

“The advocate general, M. du Lopt de la Gransiere himself.”

“Oh, oh!”

“You will not deny that he is a first-class man?”

The investigating magistrate was evidently growing

angry; though, on the other hand, M. Daubigeon seemed to have regained his calmness. "God forbid that I should deny M. de la Gransiere's eloquence," he said. "He is a powerful speaker, and rarely misses his man. But then, you know, cases are like books: they have their luck or ill luck, *habent sua fata*. Jacques will be well defended."

"I am not afraid of M. Magloire."

"But M. Folgat?"

"A young man with no weight. I should be far more afraid of M. Lachaud."

"Do you know the plan of defence?"

This was evidently where the shoe pinched; but M. Galpin-Daveline took care not to let it be seen as he replied, "I don't know it; but it does not matter. M. de Boiscoran's friends at first thought of making capital out of Cocoleu; but they have given that up. I am sure of it! The police-agent whom I have charged to keep his eyes on the idiot tells me that Dr. Seignebos does not trouble himself about the man any more."

M. Daubigeon smiled sarcastically, and, more with the view of teasing his visitor than because he believed such to be the case, exclaimed, "Take care! do not trust appearances. You have to deal with very clever people. I have always told you Cocoleu is probably the mainspring of the whole case. The very fact that M. du Lopt de la Gransiere will speak ought to make you tremble. If he should not succeed, he would, of course, blame you, and never forgive you as long as he lived. Now, you know he may fail, for 'There is many a slip between the cup and the lip.' And I am disposed to think with old Villon,—*'Rien ne m'est seur que la chose incertaine.'*"

M. Galpin saw very well that he could gain nothing by prolonging the discussion, hence he merely said, "Happen what may, I am contented with the approbation of my own conscience." Having thus spoken he hastened to take leave for fear another answer should come from M. Daubigeon. Leaving the room, he remarked to himself as he went downstairs, "It is losing time to reason with an old fogey who sees in the events of the day only so many opportunities for making quotations."

But he struggled in vain against his own feelings: he had lost his self-confidence. M. Daubigeon had revealed to him a new danger he had not foreseen. And what a

danger!—the resentment of one of the most eminent men of the French official bar, one of those bitter, bilious men who never forgive. M. Galpin-Daveline had, no doubt, thought of the possibility of failure, that is to say, of acquittal; but he had not fully considered the consequences of such a check. Who would suffer for it? The counsel for the prosecution first and foremost, for in France the prosecuting counsel makes the accusation a personal matter, and considers himself insulted and humiliated if he misses his man. Now, what would happen in such a case? No doubt M. du Lopt de la Gransiere would hold the investigating magistrate responsible. He would say,—“I had to draw my arguments from your part of the work. I did not obtain a condemnation, because your work was imperfect. A man like myself ought not to be exposed to such a humiliation, and, least of all, in a case which is sure to create an immense sensation. You do not understand your business.”

Such words would mean a public disgrace. Instead of the hoped-for promotion, they would bring him exile, to Corsica, or Algiers. M. Galpin-Daveline shuddered at the idea. He saw himself buried under the ruins of his castles in the air. And in dismay he once more went over all the papers of the investigation, analysing the evidence he had obtained, like a soldier, who, on the eve of a battle, furbishes up his arms. However, he only found one objection, the same which M. Daubigeon had made,—what interest could Jacques have had in committing so great a crime? “There,” he said, “is evidently the weak part of the armour; and I should do well to point it out to M. de la Gransiere. Jacques’s counsel are capable of making that the turning-point of their plea.”

And, in spite of all he had said to M. Daubigeon, he was very much afraid of the counsel for the defence, knew perfectly well the prestige which M. Magloire derived from his integrity and disinterestedness. It was no secret to him that a cause which M. Magloire espoused was at once considered a good one; for people said of him,—“He may be mistaken; but whatever he says he believes.” Hence he was bound to have a powerful influence, not on the judges who came into court with well-established opinions, but with the jurymen who would be under the influence of the moment, and might be carried off by the

eloquence of a speech. It is true, M. Magloire did not possess that burning eloquence which thrills a crowd; but M. Folgat possessed it, and in an uncommon degree. M. Galpin-Daveline had made inquiries; and one of his Paris friends had written to him,—“Mistrust Folgat. He is a far more dangerous logician than Lachaud, and possesses the same skill in troubling the consciences of jurymen, in moving them, in drawing tears from them, and forcing them into an acquittal. Mind, especially, any incidents that may arise during the trial; for he has always some kind of surprise in reserve.”

“These are my adversaries,” thought M. Galpin. “What surprise, I wonder, is there in store for me? Have they really given up all idea of using Cocoleu?”

He had no reason for mistrusting his agent; and yet his apprehensions became so serious, that he went out of his way to look in at the hospital. The lady superior received him as a matter of course, with all the signs of profound respect; and, when he inquired after Cocoleu, she added,—“Would you like to see him?”

“I confess I should be very glad to do so.”

“Come with me, then,” she replied, leading him into the garden, where Cocoleu was seated on the ground, playing with the gravel. He had doffed the rags with which he was clothed when he was admitted, and wore the regular hospital dress, including the long gray coat and cotton cap. He did not look any the more intelligent for the change, but, at all events, he was less repulsive.

“Well, my boy,” asked M. Galpin, “how do you like this?”

He raised his inane face, and fixed his dull eye on the lady superior; still he made no reply.

“Would you like to go back to Valpinson?” asked the magistrate this time.

Cocoleu shuddered, but did not open his lips.

“Look here,” said M. Galpin, “answer me, and I’ll give you a franc.”

No; Cocoleu would not answer. He was at his play again.

“That is his usual way,” declared the lady superior. “Since he is here, no one has ever got a word out of him. Promises, threats, nothing has any effect. One day I thought I would try an experiment; and, instead of let

ting him have his breakfast, I said to him, 'You shall have nothing to eat till you say, "I am hungry."' At the end of twenty-four hours I had to give him his pittance; for he would have starved himself sooner than utter a word."

"What does Dr. Seignebos think of him?"

"The doctor does not want to hear his name mentioned," replied the lady superior. And, raising her eyes to heaven, she added,—“And that is a clear proof, that, but for the direct intervention of providence, the poor creature would never have denounced the crime he witnessed.” Immediately, however, she turned to earthly things, and asked,—“But will you not relieve us soon of this poor idiot, who is a heavy charge on the hospital? Why not send him back to his village, where he found his support before? We have such a number of sick and poor, and such very little room.”

"We must wait, sister, till M. de Boiscoran's trial is finished," replied the magistrate.

The lady superior looked resigned. "That is what the mayor told me," she remarked, "and it is very provoking, I must say: however, they have allowed me to turn him out of the room which they gave him at first, and I have sent him to the insane ward."

At this moment she was interrupted by the hospital porter, who, cap in hand, came to announce that a gendarme had just arrived with a patient sent by Dr. Seignebos.

"Epileptic, and somewhat idiotic," said the lady superior, reading the order for admission. "As if we wanted any more! And a stranger into the bargain! Really, Dr. Seignebos is too yielding. Why does he not send all these people to their own parish to be taken care of?" So saying, and, with a very elastic step for her age, she went to the hospital parlour, followed by M. Galpin and the janitor. There sat the new patient, looking the picture of utter idiocy. Giving him a glance, the lady superior hastily ordered his removal to the insane ward, saying that he could keep Cocoleu company. Then asking M. Galpin-Daveline to excuse her, she took herself off to attend to her usual avocations.

The investigating magistrate felt somewhat reassured. "There is no danger here," he said to himself, as he walked away. "And, if M. Folgat counts upon any inci

dent during the trial, Cocoleu, at all events, will not provide it."

XXVI.

AT this very same moment, Dr. Seignebos and M. Folgat, having partaken of a frugal breakfast, were shaking hands prior to separating, the one having to visit his patients, and the other to go to the prison. The young advocate was very perplexed. He hung his head as he went down the street; and the diplomatic citizens who compared his dejected appearance with M. Galpin's victorious air, came to the conclusion that Jacques de Boiscoran was irrevocably lost. M. Folgat was for the time almost of their opinion. He was passing through one of those attacks of discouragement, to which the most energetic men succumb at times, when they are bent upon pursuing an uncertain end which they ardently desire.

The declarations made by little Martha and the governess had literally overwhelmed the young advocate. Just when he thought he had the end of the thread in his hand, the tangle had become worse than ever. And so it had been from the commencement. At each step he took, the problem had become more complicated than ever. At each effort he made, the darkness, instead of being dispelled, had grown deeper. Not that he as yet doubted Jacques's innocence. No! The suspicion which for a moment had flashed through his mind had passed away instantly. He admitted, with Dr. Seignebos, the possibility that there was an accomplice, and that it was Cocoleu, in all probability, who had been charged with the execution of the crime. But how could that fact be made useful to the defence? He saw no way. Of course Goudar was an able fellow, and the manner in which he had introduced himself into the hospital was masterly in the extreme. But however cunning he was, however experienced in all the tricks of his profession, how could he ever hope to extort confession from a man who intrenched himself behind the rampart of feigned imbecility? If he had only had an abundance of time before him! But the days were counted, and he would have to precipitate the finish.

"I feel like giving it up," thought the young lawyer, who, while following this train of thought, had reached the

prison. He felt the necessity of concealing his anxiety, and while Blangin went before him through the long passages, rattling his keys, he endeavoured to impart an expression of hopeful confidence to his countenance.

"At last you come!" cried Jacques. The latter had evidently suffered considerable anxiety during the last few hours. Feverish restlessness had distorted his features, and rendered his eyes bloodshot; and he shook all over with nervous tremour. Still he waited till the jailer had shut the door: and then asked in an agitated voice,—
"What did she say?"

M. Folgat gave him a minute account of his mission, quoting the countess's words almost literally.

"That is just like her!" exclaimed the prisoner. "I think I can hear her! What a woman! To defy me in this way!" And in his anger he clenched his fists so closely that his finger-nails almost pierced his flesh.

"You see," said the young advocate, "there is no use in trying to get outside of our circle of defence. Any new effort would be useless."

"No!" replied Jacques. "No, I shall not stop there!" And after a few moments' reflection,—if he can be said to have been able to reflect, he added, "I hope you will pardon me, my dear sir, for having exposed you to such insults. I ought to have foreseen this result, or, rather, I did foresee it. I knew that was not the way to begin the battle. But I was a coward, I was afraid, I drew back, fool that I was. As if I had not known that we should at any rate have to proceed to the last extremity! Well, I am ready now, my mind is made up!"

"What do you mean to do?"

"I shall go and see the Countess de Claudieuse. I shall tell her—"

"Oh!"

"You do not think she will deny it to my face? When once I have her under my eye, I shall make her confess the crime of which I am accused."

M. Folgat had promised Dr. Seignebois not to mention what Martha and her governess had said; but he felt no longer bound to conceal these statements. "And if the countess should not be guilty?" he asked.

"Who, then, *could* be guilty?"

"If she had an accomplice?"

"Well, she will tell me who it was. I will insist upon it, I will make her tell me. I will not be disgraced. I am innocent, I will not go to the galleys!"

To try and make Jacques listen to reason would have been madness at that moment. "Have a care," said the young lawyer, however. "Our defence is difficult enough already; do not make it still more so."

"I shall be careful."

"A scene might ruin us irrevocably."

"Don't be afraid!"

M. Folgat said nothing more. He thought he could guess by what means Jacques would try to get out of prison. Still he did not ask him for details. In his position it was his duty to ignore, or at any rate to seem to ignore certain things.

"Now, my dear sir," said the prisoner, "will your render me a service, will you tell me as accurately as possible, how the house in which the countess lives is arranged?"

Without saying a word, M. Folgat produced a sheet of paper, and drew on it a plan of the house as far as he knew it—including the garden, the entrance-hall, and the sitting-room.

"And the count's room," asked Jacques, "where is that?"

"On the upper floor."

"You are sure he cannot get up?"

"Dr. Seignebois told me so."

The prisoner seemed delighted. "Then all is right," he said, "and I have only to ask you to tell Denise that I must see her to-day, as soon as possible. I wish her to come with one of her aunts only. And, I beseech you, make haste."

M. Folgat did hasten; and, twenty minutes later, he was at M. de Chandore's house. Denise was in her room. He sent word to her that he wished to see her; and as soon as she heard that Jacques desired to speak with her, she determined to start at once. Accompanied by her aunt Elizabeth, she set out for the prison, which she reached quite out of breath from having walked so fast. Jacques met her in the parlour and pressing her hands to his lips, exclaimed, "Oh, my darling! how shall I ever thank you for your sublime fidelity in my misfortune! If I escape, my whole life will not suffice to prove my grati

tude." Then trying to master his emotion, he turned to Mademoiselle de Lavarande and added, "Will you pardon me if I beg you to render me once more the service you performed before? It is all important that no one should hear what I am going to say to Denise, I know I am watched."

Accustomed to passive obedience, the good lady did not dare to raise the slightest objection, and she instantly left the room with the view of keeping watch in the passage. Denise was very much surprised; but Jacques did not give her time to utter a word. He said at once,—“You told me in this very place, that, if I wished to escape, Blangin would furnish me with the means.”

The girl drew back, and stammered with an air of utter bewilderment,—“You do not want to fly?”

“Never! Under no circumstances! But you ought to remember, that, while resisting all your arguments, I told you, that perhaps, some day or other, I might require a few hours’ liberty.”

“I remember.”

“I begged you to sound the jailer on that point.”

“I did so. For money he will always be ready to do your bidding.”

Jacques seemed to breath more freely. “Well, then,” he said again, “the time has come. To-morrow I shall have to be away all the evening. I should like to leave about nine; and I shall be back by midnight.”

Denise stopped him. “Wait,” she said: “I want to call Blangin’s wife.”

The jailer’s household was like many others. Out of doors the husband was brutal, imperious, and tyrannical: he talked loud and positively, and thus made it appear that he was the master. The wife on the contrary was humble, submissive, apparently resigned, and always ready to obey; but in reality she ruled by intelligence far more surely than he ruled by force. When the husband promised anything, his wife’s consent had still to be obtained; but, when the wife made any arrangement, the husband was bound through her. Denise was aware of this, and knew very well that first of all she must win over the wife. Madame Blangin on entering the parlour was full of hypocritical assurances of good-will. She vowed that she was heart and soul at her dear mistress’s command, and re-

called with delight the happy days when she was in M. de Chandore's service,—days she was always regretting.

"I know you are attached to me," interrupted Denise. "But listen!" And then she promptly explained what she wanted; while Jacques, standing a little aside in the shade, watched the impression on the woman's face. Gradually she raised her head; and, when Denise had finished, she remarked in a very different tone,—“I understand perfectly, and, if I were the master, I should say, ‘All right!’ But Blangin is master of the jail. Well, he is not a bad fellow; but he insists upon doing his duty. We have nothing but our place to live upon.”

“Have I not paid you as much as your place is worth?”

“Oh, I know you don't mind paying.”

“You promised me to speak to your husband about this matter.”

“I have done so: but—”

“I would give as much as I did before.”

“In gold?”

“Well be it so, in gold.”

A flash of covetousness peered forth from under the woman's thick brows, still she retained all her self-possession as she rejoined, “In that case, my man will probably consent. I will go and put him right, and then you can talk to him.”

She went out hastily, and, as soon as she had disappeared, Jacques asked Denise how much she had paid the Blangins so far. Learning that she had expended as much as seventeen thousand francs, he could not refrain from stigmatising the jailer's conduct as downright robbery. But Denise interrupted him with the remark that money did not matter so long as he were only free. Just then Blangin's heavy tread was heard in the passage; and almost immediately afterwards he entered, cap in hand and looking obsequious and restless. “My wife has told me every thing,” he said, “and I consent. Only we must understand each other. This is no trifle you are asking for.”

“Let us not exaggerate the matter,” interrupted Jacques. “I do not mean to escape: I only want to leave for a time. I will come back, I give you my word of honour.”

“Upon my life that is not what troubles me. If the question were only to let you run off altogether, I should open the doors wide, and say, ‘Good by!’ A prisoner

who runs away—that happens every day; but a prisoner who leaves for a few hours, and comes back again—Suppose anybody were to see you in the town? Or if any one came and wanted to see you while you were gone? Or if they saw you come back again? What could I say? I am quite ready to be turned of for negligence. I have been paid for that. But to be tried as an accomplice, and to be put into jail myself. Stay! That is not what I mean to do.”

This was evidently but a preface. “Oh! why lose so many words!” asked Denise. “Explain yourself clearly.”

“Well, M. de Boiscoran cannot leave by the gate. Atattoo at eight o’clock, the soldiers on guard at this season of the year go inside the prison, and until *reveille* in the morning, or, in other words, till five o’clock, I can neither open nor shut the gates without calling the sergeant in command of the post.”

Did he want to extort more money? Did he make the difficulties out greater than they really were? Jacques did not know. Still he remarked, “After all, if you consent, there must be a way.”

The jailer could dissemble no longer. “If the thing is to be done,” he replied, “you must get out as if you were escaping in good earnest. To my knowledge, the wall between the two towers is in one place not over two feet thick; and on the other side, where there are nothing but bare grounds and the old ramparts, a sentinel is never put. I will get you a crowbar and a pickaxe, and you can make a hole in the wall.”

Jacques shrugged his shoulders. “And next day,” he said, “when I come back, how will you explain that hole?”

Blangin smiled. “You may be sure,” he replied, “I shan’t say the rats did it. I have thought of that too. Another prisoner will run off with you, and he won’t come back.”

“What prisoner?”

“Why, Frumence, to be sure. He will be delighted to get away, and he will help you in making the hole in the wall. You must make your bargain with him, but, of course, without letting him know that I am in the secret. In this way happen what may, I shall not be in danger.”

The plan was really a good one; only Blangin ought not

to have claimed the honour of inventing it; for the idea came from his wife.

"Well," replied Jacques, "that is settled. Get me the pickaxe and the crowbar, show me the place where we must make the hole, and I will take charge of Frumence. To-morrow you shall have the money."

He was on the point of following the jailer, when Denise held him back: raising her beautiful eyes, she said in a trembling voice,—“You see, Jacques, I have not hesitated to dare everything in order to procure you a few hours' liberty. May I not know what you are going to do?” And, as he made no reply, she repeated,—“Where are you going?”

The blood rushed to the prisoner's face. “I beseech you, Denise,” he replied, “do not insist upon my telling you. Permit me to keep this secret, the only one I have ever kept from you.”

Two tears trembled for a moment in the girl's long lashes, and then silently rolled down her cheeks. “I understand you,” she stammered, “I understand but too well. Although I know so little of life, I had a presentiment, as soon as I saw that they were hiding something from me. Now I cannot doubt any longer. You mean to go and see some woman to-morrow—”

“Denise,” Jacques said with folded hands,—“Denise, I beseech you!”

She would not hear him. Gently shaking her head, she went on,—“A woman whom you have loved, or whom you love still, at whose feet you have probably murmured the same words that you whispered at mine. How could you think of her in the midst of all these anxieties? She cannot love you, I am sure. Why did she not come to you when she found that you were in prison, falsely accused of an abominable crime?”

Jacques could bear it no longer. “Great God!” he cried, “I would a thousand times rather tell you everything than allow such a suspicion to remain in your heart! Listen, and forgive me.”

But she stopped him, placing her hand before his lips. “No, I do not wish to know anything,” she answered,—“Nothing at all. I believe in you. Only you must remember that you are everything to me,—hope, life, happiness. Even if you should have deceived me, I know but

too well—poor me!—that I could not cease loving you; but I should not have long to suffer.”

Jacques was overcome with grief. “Denise, Denise, my darling,” he pleaded, “let me confess to you who this woman is, and why I must see her.”

“No,” she interrupted, “no! Do what your conscience bids you to do. I believe in you.” And instead of offering to let him kiss her forehead, as usual, she hurried away with her aunt, so swiftly, that, when he rushed after her, he only saw, as it were, a shadow at the end of the long passage.

Never until this moment had Jacques really found himself ready to hate the Countess de Claudieuse with that blind and furious hatred which dreams of nothing but vengeance. Many a time, no doubt, he had cursed her in the solitude of his prison; but even when he was most furious against her, a feeling of pity had risen in his heart for one whom he had once loved so dearly; for he did not disguise it to himself, he had once loved her to distraction. And even in prison he had trembled as he thought of some of his first meetings with her; as in his mind’s eye he had conjured up a vision of her features, or in fancy heard her silvery voice, or inhaled her favourite perfume. True enough she had exposed him to the danger of losing his position, his future, his honour, his life even: and still he had felt inclined to forgive her. But now she threatened him with the loss of his betrothed, with the loss of the pure chaste love which glowed in Denise’s heart, and this he could not endure. “I will spare her no longer,” he cried, mad with wrath. “I will no longer hesitate!” He was more than ever determined to risk the adventure on the next day, feeling certain that his courage would not fail him now.

It so happened that night—perhaps by the jailer’s skilful management—that Frumence was ordered to take the prisoner back to his cell, and “curl him up.” Jacques called him in, and plainly told him what he wanted him to do. Upon Blangin’s assurance, he expected that the vagabond would jump at the mere idea of escaping from jail. But by no means. Frumence’s smiling features grew dark; and, scratching himself behind the ear, he replied,—“You see—excuse me, I don’t want to run away at all.”

Jacques was amazed. If Frumence refused his assistance, he could not go out, or, at least, he would have to wait. "Are you in earnest?" he asked.

"Certainly I am, sir. You see I am not so badly off here. I have a good bed, I have two meals a day, I have nothing to do, and now and then, from one man or another, I pick up a few coppers to buy a pinch of tobacco or a glass of wine."

"But your liberty?"

"Well I shall get that too. I have committed no crime. I may have got over a wall into an orchard; but people are not hanged for that. I have consulted M. Magloire, and he told me precisely how I stand. They will try me in a police-court, and they will give me three or four months. Well, that is not so bad. But, if I run away, they will put the gendarmes on my track; they will bring me back here; and then I know how they will treat me. Besides, to break out of jail is a grave offence!"

Jacques was greatly perplexed as to how he could overcome such wise conclusions and excellent reasons. "Why should the gendarmes take you again?" he asked.

"Because they are gendarmes, sir. And then, that is not all. If it were spring, I should say at once, 'I am your man.' But we are in autumn now; we are going to have bad weather, and work will be scarce." Although an incurable idler, Frumence had always a good deal to say about work.

"So you won't help them in the vintage?" asked Jacques.

The vagabond looked somewhat glum. "To be sure, the vintage must have commenced," he said. "But then," added he more cheerfully, "it only lasts a fortnight, and then comes winter. And winter is no man's friend: it's my enemy. I have been without a place to lie down when it has been freezing hard enough to split stones, and when the snow was a foot deep. Now here one has a stove and warm clothes."

"Yes; but there are no merry evenings here, Frumence, eh? None of those merry evenings, when the hot wine goes round, and you tell the girls all sorts of stories, by the light of the blazing logs?"

"Oh! I know. I'd enjoy those evenings. But where should I go, not having so much as a sou?"

That was exactly where Jacques wanted to lead him. "I have money," he said.

"I know you have."

"You do not think I would let you go off with empty pockets? I would give you anything you may ask."

"Really?" cried the vagrant. And looking at Jacques with a mingled expression of hope, surprise, and delight, he added,—“You see I should want a good deal. Winter is long. I should want—let me see, I should want fifty napoleons!”

"You shall have them," said Jacques.

Frumence's eyes began to dance. He probably had a vision of those irresistible taverns at Rochefort, where he had led such a merry life. But he could not believe such happiness to be real. "You are not making fun of me?" he asked timidly.

"Do you want the whole sum at once?" replied Jacques. "Wait." And from the drawer in his table he drew a thousand-franc note. At the sight of it, the vagrant drew back the hand which he had promptly stretched out to take the money.

"Oh, that kind?" said he, "No! I know what that paper is worth: I have had some of them myself. But what could I do with one of them now? To me it would not be worth more than a blade of straw; for, at the first place where I tried to get it changed, they would arrest me."

"That is easily remedied. By to-morrow I can obtain gold, or small notes, so you can have your choice."

This time Frumence clapped his hands with joy. "Give me some of one kind, and some of the other," he said, "and I'm your man! Hurrah for liberty! Where is the wall that we are to go through?"

"I will show you to-morrow; and till then, Frumence, silence."

It was only the next day that Blangin showed Jacques the place where the wall was least thick. It was in a kind of cellar, where nobody ever came, and where cast-off tools were stored away. "In order that you may not be interrupted," said the jailer, I will ask two of my comrades to dine with me, and I shall invite the sergeant on duty. They will enjoy themselves, and never think of the prisoners. My wife will keep a sharp lookout; and, if any of

the rounds should come this way, she'll warn you, and quick as lightening, you'll be back in your room."

All was settled; and, as soon as night came, Jacques and Frumence, taking a candle with them, slipped into the cellar, and went to work. It was a hard task to get through the old wall, and Jacques would never have been able to accomplish it alone. The thickness was even less than what Blangin had stated it to be; but the hardness was far beyond expectation. Our forefathers were good masons, and in course of time the cement had become one with the stone, acquiring the same solidity. It was as if they had attacked a block of granite. Fortunately the vagrant had a strong arm; and, in spite of the precautions which they had to take to prevent being heard, he had, in less than an hour, made a hole through which a man could pass. He put his head in: and, after a moment's examination, exclaimed, "It's all right! The night is dark, and the place is deserted. Upon my word, I'll risk it!"

So saying he went through; Jacques followed: and instinctively they hastened towards a dark place shaded by several trees. Once there, Jacques handed Frumence a package of five-franc notes. "Add this to the napoleons I have already given you," he said. "And thank you besides: you are a good fellow, and if I get out of my trouble, I won't forget you. Now let us part. Make haste, be careful not to be discovered, and good luck to you!"

After these words he went off rapidly. Frumence, however, did not march away in the opposite direction, as had been agreed upon. "This is a curious story about this poor gentleman," he muttered to himself. "Where on earth can he be going?" And, curiosity getting the better of prudence, he followed Jacques.

XXVII.

M. DE BOISCORAN knew with what horror he was looked upon by the population of Sauveterre, and in order to avoid being recognised, and perhaps arrested, he did not take the most direct route from the prison to the Rue Mautrec, nor did he choose the more frequented streets. He went a long way round, and well-nigh lost himself in the dark winding lanes of the old town. He walked along

in feverish haste, turning aside from the rare passers-by, pulling his felt hat down over his eyes, and, for still greater safety, holding his handkerchief over his face. It was nearly half-past nine when he at last reached the house inhabited by the Count and Countess de Claudieuse. The gate was closed. This circumstance did not affect him, however, for he had his plan, and boldly rang the bell. A maid, who did not know him, came to open.

"Is the Countess de Claudieuse indoors?" he asked.

"The countess does not see anybody," replied the girl. "She is sitting up with the count, who is very ill to-night."

"But I must see her."

"Impossible."

"Tell her that a gentleman who has been sent by M. Galpin-Daveline desires to see her for a moment. It is about the Boiscoran affair."

"Why did you not say so at once?" said the servant. "Come in." And forgetting, in her hurry, to close the gate again, she walked in front of Jacques through the garden, showed him into the vestibule, and then opened the door of the sitting room, where she asked him to wait, while she fetched Madame de Claudieuse. Before doing so, however, she lit one of the candles on the mantelpiece. So far, everything had gone well for Jacques, and even better than he could have expected. Nothing now remained to be done, but to prevent the countess from escaping should she try to do so when she recognised him. Fortunately the door opened into the room: and accordingly standing so that he should be behind it when the countess entered, Jacques anxiously awaited her approach.

For twenty-four hours he had prepared himself for this interview, and arranged in his head the very words he would use. But now, at the last moment, all his ideas flew away, like dry leaves before the flash of a tempest. His heart beat with such violence, that he fancied it filled the whole room with the noise. He imagined he was cool, but in fact he only possessed that lucidity which gives an appearance of sense to certain mad actions. He was growing surprised at being kept waiting so long, when, at last, a light footfall, and the rustling of a dress, warned him that the countess was coming. She entered, dressed in a long, dark robe, and took a few steps forward into the room, astonished at not seeing the person who was waiting for

her. It was exactly as Jacques had foreseen. With a violent push he closed the door; and standing in front of it, exclaimed, "At last we meet!"

Madame de Claudieuse turned round at the noise. One swift glance and she had recognised him. "Jacques!" she shrieked, and then, as terrified as if she had seen a ghost, she looked around her, eager to discover some means of flight. One of the tall windows of the room reaching to the ground was half open, and she rushed towards it; but Jacques anticipated her. "Do not attempt to escape;" he said, "for I swear I should pursue you even into your husband's room, to the very foot of his bed."

She looked at him as if she did not comprehend. "You," she stammered,—*"you here!"*

"Yes," he replied, "I am here. You are astonished, are you? You said to yourself, 'He is in prison, well kept under lock and key: I can sleep in peace. No evidence can be found. He will not speak. I have committed the crime, and he will be punished for it. I am guilty; but I shall escape. He is innocent, and he is lost.' You thought it was all settled? Well, no, it is not. I am here!"

An expression of unspeakable horror contracted the countess's beautiful features. "This is monstrous!" she said.

"Monstrous, indeed!"

"Murderer! Incendiary!"

He burst out laughing, a strident, convulsive, terrible laugh. "And you," he said, *"you call me thus?"*

By one great effort the Countess de Claudieuse recovered her energy. "Yes," she replied, "yes, I do! You cannot deny your crime to me. I know, I know the motives which the judges do not even guess. You thought I would carry out my threats, and you were frightened. When I left you in such haste, you said to yourself, 'It is all over. she will tell her husband.' And then you kindled that fire in order to draw my husband out of the house, you incendiary! And then you fired at him, you murderer!"

He was still laughing. "And that is your plan?" he broke in. "Who do you think will believe such an absurd story? Our letters were burnt; and, if you deny having been my mistress, I can just as well deny having been your lover. And, besides would the exposure do me any harm? You know very well it would not. You are perfectly aware

that, as society is constituted, the same thing which disgraces a woman rather raises a man in the estimation of the world. And as to my being afraid of the Count de Claudieuse, it is well known that I am afraid of nobody. At the time when we were concealing our love in the house in the Rue des Vignes, yes, at that time, I might have been afraid of your husband; for he might have surprised us there, the code in one hand, a revolver in the other, and have availed himself of that stupid and savage law which makes the husband the judge of his own case, and the executor of the sentence which he himself pronounces. But setting aside such a case,—the case of being taken in the act—which allows a man to kill another man like a dog, what did I care for the Count de Claudieuse? What did I care for your threats or for his hatred?" Jacques uttered these words with perfect calmness, but in a cold, cutting tone, as sharp as a sword.

The countess tottered, and in an almost inaudible voice, she stammered, "Who could imagine such a thing? Is it possible!" Then suddenly raising her head, she added more calmly: "But I am losing my senses. If you are innocent, who, then, could be guilty?"

Jacques seized her hands almost madly, and pressing them painfully, and bending over her so closely that she felt his hot breath like a flame touching her face, he hissed into her ear, "You, wretched creature, you!" Then pushing her from him with such violence that she fell into a chair, he continued, "You, who wanted to be a widow in order to prevent me from breaking the chains in which you held me. At our last meeting, when I thought you were crushed by grief, and felt overcome by your hypocritical tears, I was weak enough, I was stupid enough, to say that I only married Denise because you were not free. Then you cried, 'O God, how happy I am; that idea never occurred to me before!' What idea was that, Genevieve? Come, answer me and confess that it occurred to you too soon after all, since you have carried into execution!" He paused for a second and then repeated with crushing irony the words just uttered by the countess. "If you are innocent, who, then, could be guilty?"

Quite beside herself, she sprang from her chair, and casting at Jacques one of those glances which penetrate through our eyes into our very heart, she asked, "Is it really possi-

ble that you did not commit this abominable crime?" Seeing that he shrugged his shoulders, she added, almost panting, "But then, is it true, can it really be true, that you think I committed it?"

"Perhaps you only ordered it to be committed."

With a wild gesture she raised her arms to heaven: "O God, O God!" she cried in a heart-rending voice. "He believes it! he really believes it!"

There followed a great silence, a dismal, formidable silence, such as in nature follows the crash of the thunderbolt. Standing face to face, Jacques and the Countess de Claudieuse looked at each other, feeling that the fatal hour in their lives had come at last. Each had the same growing, sure conviction. There was no need of explanations. They had been misled by appearances: they acknowledged it; they were certain of it. And this discovery was so fearful, so overwhelming, that neither thought who the really guilty one might be.

"What is to be done?" asked the countess.

"The truth must be told," replied Jacques.

"What truth?"

"That I was your lover; that I went to Valpinson by appointment with you; that the cartridge-case which was found there was used by me to get a light; that my blackened hands were soiled by the half-burnt fragments of our letters, which I had tried to scatter."

"Never!" cried the countess.

Jacques's face turned crimson, as he said with an accent of merciless severity, "It shall be told! I will have it so, and it must be done!"

"Never!" the countess cried again, "never!" And with convulsive haste she added, "Do you not see that the truth cannot possibly be told? They would never believe in our innocence. They would only look upon us as accomplices."

"Never mind. I am not willing to die."

"Say that you will not die alone."

"Be it so."

"To confess everything would never save you but would most assuredly ruin me. Is that what you want? Would your fate appear less cruel to you, if there were two victims instead of one?"

He stopped her with a threatening gesture. "Are

you always the same?" he cried. "I am sinking, I am drowning; and she calculates, she bargains! And she said she loved me!"

"Jacques!" interrupted the countess. And drawing close to him she said, "Ah! I calculate, I bargain. Well, listen. Yes, it is true. I did value my reputation as an honest woman more highly, a thousand times more, than my life; but, above my life and my reputation, I valued you. You are drowning, you say. Well, then, let us fly. One word from you, and I leave all,—honour, country, family, husband, children. Say one word, and I follow you without turning my head, without a regret, without a pang of remorse."

She was shivering from head to foot; her bosom rose and fell; her eyes shone with unbearable brilliancy. Owing to the violence of her action, her dress, put on in great haste, had unfastened, and her dishevelled hair flowed in golden masses over her bosom and shoulders. It was in a voice trembling with pent-up passion, now sweet and soft like a tender caress, and now deep and sonorous like a bell, that she next spoke. "What keeps us? Since you have escaped from prison, the greatest difficulty is overcome. I thought at first of taking our girl, your girl, Jacques; but she is very ill; and besides a child might betray us. If we go alone they will never overtake us. We shall have money enough, I am sure, Jacques. We will fly to one of those distant countries of whose fairy-like beauty one reads in books of travel. There, unknown, unnoticed, forgotten, our life will be one unbroken enjoyment. You will never again say that I bargain. I will be yours, entirely and solely yours, body and soul, your wife, your slave."

She threw her head back, and looking at him with half-closed eyes, she added, "Say, Jacques, will you? Jacques!"

He pushed her aside with a fierce gesture. It seemed to him almost a sacrilege that she also, like Denise, should propose to him to fly. "Rather the galleys!" he cried.

She turned deadly pale; a spasm of rage convulsed her features; and drawing back, stiff and stern, she asked, "What else do you want?"

"Your help to save me," he replied.

"At the risk of ruining myself?"

He made no reply, and then she, who had just been all humility, raised herself to her full height, and in a tone of

bitter sarcasm said, "In other words, you want me to sacrifice myself, and at the same time all my family. For your sake? Yes, but even more for Mademoiselle de Chandore's sake. . And you think that is a simple matter. I am the past to you—satiety, disgust. She is the future,—desire, happiness. And you think it quite natural that the discarded woman should make a footstool of her love and honour for her rival? You think little of my being disgraced, providing she be honoured; of my weeping bitterly, if she but smile? Ah, no, no! It is madness for you to come and ask me to save you, so that you may throw yourself into another's arms. It is madness, when, in order to tear you away from Denise, I am ready to ruin myself, provide only that you give her up!"

"Wretch!" cried Jacques.

She looked at him with a mocking air, and her eyes beamed with infernal audacity. "You do not know me yet," she cried. "Go, speak, denounce me! M. Folgat, no doubt, has told you how I can deny and defend myself."

Maddened by indignation, and excited to a point when reason loses all power over us, Jacques de Boiscoran moved with uplifted hand towards the countess; but, as he did so, a stern voice exclaimed, "Do not strike that woman!"

Jacques and the countess turned round together, and uttered, both at the same instant, a sharp, terrible cry, which must have been heard at a great distance. On the threshold of the room stood the Count de Claudieuse, a revolver in his hand, and ready to fire. He looked as pale as a ghost; and the white flannel dressing-gown which he had hastily thrown over his shoulders hung like a pall around his lean limbs. The countess's first shriek when she recognised Jacques had reached the room where he lay, apparently dying. A terrible presentiment had seized him. He had risen from his bed, and, dragging himself slowly along, clinging painfully to the balusters he had come downstairs. "I have heard everything," he said, casting crushing looks at both the guilty ones.

With a deep, hoarse groan, the countess sank into a chair. But Jacques drew himself up to his full height. "My life is yours, sir," he said. "Avenge yourself."

The count shrugged his shoulders. "The assize court will avenge me," he replied.

"My God, you will allow me to be condemned for a crime which I have not committed. Ah, that would be the meanest cowardice."

The count was so feeble that he had to lean against the door-post. "Would it be cowardly?" he asked. "Then, what do you call the act of a man who meanly, disgracefully robs another man of his wife, and palms off his own children upon him? It is true you are neither an incendiary nor an assassin. But what is fire in my house in comparison with the ruin of all my faith? What are the wounds in my body in comparison with that wound in my heart, which can never heal? I leave you to the court, sir."

Jacques was terrified: he saw the abyss open that was to swallow him up. "Rather death," he cried,—*"death."* And, baring his breast, he added, "But why do you not fire, sir? why do you not fire? Are you afraid of blood? Shoot? I have been your wife's lover; your youngest daughter is my child." . . .

The count lowered his weapon. "The assize court is more certain," he said. "You have robbed me of my honour; now I want yours. And, if it be necessary, so that you may be condemned, I shall swear that I recognised you. . . . You shall go to the galleys, M. de Boisjoran!"

He was on the point of advancing, but his strength was exhausted, and he fell forward, face downward, and arms outstretched. Overcome with horror, maddened by despair, Jacques fled from the spot.

XXVIII.

M. FOLGAT was dressing. Standing before his mirror, he had just finished shaving himself, when the door of his room was suddenly opened, and old Anthony presented himself, evidently distressed. "Ah, sir, what a terrible thing!" he said.

"What?"

"Run away, disappeared!"

"Who?"

"M. Jacques!"

M. Folgat's surprise was so great, that he nearly let his

razor drop: however, he peremptorily replied, "That's false!"

"Alas, sir!" rejoined the old servant, "everybody talks of it in the town. All the details are known. I have just seen a man who says he met master last night, at about eleven o'clock running like a madman down the Rue Nationale."

"How absurd!"

"I told Mademoiselle Denise about it, and she sent me to you. You ought to go and make inquiries."

The advice was not needed. Wiping his face hastily, the young advocate immediately finished his toilette. He hurried downstairs, and was crossing the passage, when he heard somebody call his name. Turning round, he perceived Denise, who signed to him to come into the boudoir and speak with her.

Those two alone knew what a desperate venture Jacques had determined on the night before. In answer to Denise's inquiries the young advocate replied that the report of M. de Boiscoran's running away must be false.

"Who knows?" she asked.

"His evasion would be a confession of his crime," he answered. "It is only the guilty who try to escape; and M. de Boiscoran is innocent. You can rest quite assured, madame, it is not so. I pray you be quiet."

Denise needed comforting words, for she was as pale as death; while big tears rolled from her eyes, and at each word a violent sob rose in her throat. "You know where Jacques went last night?" she asked again.

She turned her head a little aside, as she heard M. Folgat answer, "Yes," and then continued in a scarcely audible voice, "He went to see a person whose influence over him is, probably, all-powerful. It may be that she has upset him, unnerved him. Might she not have prevailed upon him to escape from the disgrace of appearing in court, charged with such a crime?"

"No, madame, no!"

"This person has always been Jacques's evil genius. She loves him, I am sure. She must have been incensed at the idea of his becoming my husband. Perhaps, in order to induce him to escape, she has fled with him."

"Ah, do not be afraid, madame: the Countess de Claudieuse is incapable of such devotion."

Denise threw herself back in utter amazement ; and, gazing at the young advocate with open eyes, she repeated with an air of stupefaction,—“The Countess de Claudieuse !”

M. Folgat saw his indiscretion. He had been under the impression that Jacques had told his betrothed everything ; and her very manner of speaking had confirmed him in his conviction.

“Ah, it is the Countess de Claudieuse,” she went on,—“that lady whom all revere as if she were a saint. And yet only the other day I marvelled at her fervour,—I pitied her with all my heart,—I—Ah ! now I see what they were hiding from me.”

The young advocate was distressed at having made such a blunder. “I shall never forgive myself, madame,” said he, “for having mentioned that name in your presence.”

Denise smiled sadly. “Perhaps you have rendered me a great service, sir, but I pray, go and try and learn the truth about this report.”

M. Folgat had not walked half way down the street, before he became aware that something extraordinary must really have happened. The whole town was in an uproar. People stood at their doors, talking with unusual animation, and here and there on the footways groups were engaged in lively discussion. Hastening his steps, he was just turning into the Rue Nationale, when he was stopped by three or four gentlemen, whose acquaintance he had made in some way or other during his sojourn in the town. “Well, sir,” said one of these amiable friends, “it seems your client is running about nicely.”

“I do not understand you,” replied M. Folgat in a frigid tone.

“What ? Don’t you know your client has run off ?”

“Are you quite sure of it ?”

“Certainly. The wife of a workman whom I employ was the person through whom the escape became known. She had gone on to the old ramparts to cut grass for her goat ; and coming to the prison wall, she perceived a big hole in it. She gave the alarm at once ; the guard came up ; and the matter was immediately reported to the public prosecutor.”

This statement was not sufficient for M. Folgat : “And M. de Boiscoran ?” he asked.

"He cannot be found," was the reply. "Ah, I tell you, it is just as I say. I know it from a friend who heard it from a clerk at the mayor's office. They say that Blangin the jailer is seriously implicated."

The young advocate quitted his acquaintances abruptly, leaving them somewhat offended by such treatment; but that was of little consequence for M. Folgat, who hurried as fast as he could across the Place du Marche Neuf. He was growing apprehensive. He did not fear an evasion, but thought some fearful catastrophe might have occurred. At least, a hundred persons were assembled near the prison gate, gaping with open mouths and gazing with eager eyes; and the sentinels had considerable trouble in keeping them back. M. Folgat made his way through the crowd, and entered the court-yard. Here he found the public prosecutor, the chief of the police service, the captain of gendarmes, M. Seneschal the mayor, and finally M. Galpin-Daveline, all standing in front of Blangin's lodge, engaged in animated conversation. M. Galpin-Daveline looked especially pale. He had heard of the reports even before M. Folgat, and had hastened to the prison with the view of ascertaining the truth. On his way he had met with unmistakable evidence that if public opinion was fiercely roused against the accused, it was as deeply excited against himself. On all sides he had been greeted with ironical salutations, mocking smiles, and even expressions of condolence. Indeed two persons whom he suspected of being in close connection with Dr. Seignebos, had even murmured, as he passed, "Cheated, Mr. Bloodhound." He was the first to notice the young advocate, and at once asked if he came for news.

"I have heard all kinds of reports," replied M. Folgat, "but they do not affect me. M. de Boiscoran has too much confidence in the excellence of his cause and the justice of his countrymen to think of escaping. I only came to confer with him."

"And you are right!" exclaimed M. Daubigeon. "M. de Boiscoran is in his cell, utterly unaware of all the rumours that are afloat. It is Frumence who has run off,—Frumence, the light-footed. He was kept in prison for form's sake only, and helped the keeper as a kind of assistant jailer. He it is who made a hole in the

wall, and escaped, thinking, no doubt, that the heavens are a better roof than the finest prison."

Just behind the group of officials, stood Blangin, the jailer, affecting a contrite air. M. Galpin turned towards him. "Take the counsel to the prisoner Boiscoran," he said dryly, fearing, perhaps, that M. Daubigeon might regale the public with all the bitter epigrams with which he had visited him in private."

The jailer bowed to the ground, and prepared to obey the order; but, as soon as he was alone with M. Folgat inside the building, he blew up his cheek, and tapping it, cried, "Cheated all round." Immediately afterwards he burst out laughing. The young advocate pretended not to understand him. It was but prudent that he should appear ignorant of what had happened the night before, and thus avoid all suspicion of a complicity which substantially did not exist. "And still," continued Blangin, "this is not the end of it yet. The gendarmes are out, and if they catch poor Frumence, why he is such a fool, that the most stupid judge would worm his secret out of him in five minutes!"

M. Folgat still made no reply; but the jailer did not seem to mind his reticence,—“I only want to do one thing,” he said, “and that is to give up my keys as soon as possible. I am tired of this profession. Besides, I shan’t be able to stay here much longer. This escape has worried the authorities, and they are going to give me an assistant, an ex-police sergeant, a real watch-dog. Ah! M. de Boiscoran’s good days are over; no more stolen visits, no more promenades. He is to be watched day and night.” Blangin had given all these explanations at the foot of the stairs. “Let us go up,” he now said, seeing that M. Folgat showed signs of impatience.

The young advocate found Jacques lying on the bed, and at the first glance he saw that a great misfortune had happened. “One more hope gone?” he asked.

The prisoner raised himself up with difficulty, and then replied in a voice of utter despair,—“I am lost, and this time hopelessly.”

“Oh!”

“Just listen!”

The young advocate could not help shuddering as he heard Jacques’s account of what had happened the night

before. When it was finished, he remarked,—“You are right. If the Count de Claudieuse carries out his threat, it may be a condemnation.”

“It must be a condemnation, you mean. You need not doubt, for I know he will carry out his threat.”

M. Folgat seemed greatly distressed. “Tell me,” he said, “what did you do after leaving the house?”

Jacques passed his hand mechanically over his forehead, as if to collect his scattered thoughts. “I fled precipitately,” he answered, “just like a man who has committed a crime. The garden-gate was open, and I rushed out. I could not tell you with certainty in what direction I ran or through what streets I passed. I had but one fixed idea,—to get away from that house as quickly and as far as possible. I did not know what I was doing. I went on and on. When I came to myself, I was several miles away from Sauveterre, on the road to Boiscoran. An animal instinct had led me towards my house. At the first moment I could not comprehend how I had got there. I felt like a drunkard whose head is filled with the vapours of alcohol, and who, when roused, tries to remember what has happened during his intoxication. Alas! I recalled the fearful reality but too soon. I knew that I ought to go back to prison, that it was an absolute necessity; and yet I felt at times so weary, so exhausted, that I was afraid I should not be able to get back. Still I did reach the prison. Blangin was waiting for me, all anxiety; for it was nearly two o’clock. He helped me to get up here. I threw myself, all dressed as I was, on the bed, and fell fast asleep in an instant. But my sleep was a miserable sleep, broken by terrible dreams, in which I saw myself chained by the leg, or mounting the scaffold with a priest by my side; and even at this moment I hardly know whether I am awake or asleep, and whether I am not still suffering from a fearful nightmare.”

M. Folgat could hardly restrain himself. “Poor fellow,” he murmured.

“Yes, poor fellow!” repeated Jacques. “Why did I not follow my first inspiration last night when I found myself on the high-road? I should have gone on to Boiscoran, and blown out my brains. I should have had no more suffering then.”

Was he once more giving himself up to that fatal idea of suicide? thought M. Folgat. "And your parents?"

"My parents! And do you think they will survive my condemnation?"

"And Mademoiselle de Chandore?"

Jacques shuddered. "Ah! it is for her sake first of all that I ought to make an end of it," he fiercely replied. "Poor Denise! Certainly she would grieve terribly when she heard of my death. But she is not twenty yet. My memory would soon fade from her heart; and as the weeks grew to months, and the months to years, she would find comfort. 'To live' means 'to forget.'"

"You cannot really believe what you are saying!" interrupted M. Folgat. "You know very well that she—she would never forget you!"

Tears stood in the prisoner's eyes. "You are right," he murmured. "If I struck myself I should strike her also. But what would life be after condemnation? Can you imagine what her sensations would be, if day after day she had to say to herself, 'The only man I love upon earth is at the galleys mingling with the lowest of criminals, disgraced for life, dishonoured.' Ah! death would be a thousand times preferable."

"Jacques, M. de Boiscoran, do you forget that you have given me your word of honour?"

"The proof that I have not forgotten it is that you see me here. But, never mind, the day is not far off when you will see me so wretched that you yourself will be the first to put a weapon in my hands."

The young advocate was one of those men whom difficulties only excite and stimulate, instead of discouraging. He had already somewhat recovered from the first great shock and accordingly replied,—“Before you throw down your hand, wait, at least, till the game is lost. You are not sentenced yet. Far from it! You are innocent, and divine justice corrects the blunders of earthly justice. Who knows that the Count de Claudieuse will really give evidence? Perhaps at this very moment he is already dead!”

Jacques turned deadly pale. "Ah! don't say that!" he exclaimed. "The fatal thought has already occurred to me, and yet I trust it is not so, for then I should really be responsible for his death. When I woke up, all my

anxiety was for him, and I thought of getting Blangin to make inquiries; but I did not dare do so. M. Folgat fully shared the prisoner's anxiety. "We cannot remain in this uncertainty," he said. "We can do nothing as long as we do not know the count's fate, for on his fate our own depends. Allow me to leave you now. I will let you know as soon as I hear anything positive. And, above all, keep up your courage, whatever may happen."

The young advocate was sure of obtaining reliable information at Dr. Seignebo's house. He hastened there; and, as soon as he entered, the physician called out,—
"Ah, you have come at last! I give up twenty of my worst patients to see you, and you keep me waiting for hours. Still I was sure you would come. What happened last night at the Count de Claudieuse's house?"

"Then you know—"

"I know nothing. I have seen the results; but I do not know the cause. The result was this: last night, about eleven o'clock, I had just gone to bed, tired to death, when, all of a sudden, somebody rings at my bell as if he were determined to break it. I do not like people to perform so violently at my door; and I was getting up to let the man know my mind, when the Count de Claudieuse's servant rushed in, pushing my own servant unceremoniously aside, and called to me to come instantly, as his master had just died."

"Good heavens!"

"That is what he said, and my surprise was infinite, for although I knew the count was very ill, I did not think he was so near death."

"Then he is really dead?"

"Not at all. But, if you interrupt me continually, I shall never be able to tell you." And taking off his spectacles, wiping them, and putting them on again, the doctor continued,—
"I dressed at once, and in a few minutes I was at the house. They asked me to go into the sitting-room down stairs. There, to my great amazement, I found the Count de Claudieuse, lying on a sofa. He was pale and stiff, his features fearfully distorted, and on his forehead, I found a slight wound, from which a thread of blood was trickling. Upon my word, I thought it was all over."

"And the countess?"

‘The countess was kneeling by her husband; and with the help of her women, she was trying to resuscitate him by rubbing him, and putting hot napkins on his chest. But for these wise precautions she would be a widow at this moment; whilst, as it is, he may live a long time yet, I really believe this precious count has as many lives as a cat. Four of us carried him up stairs, and put him to bed. He soon began to move, and opened his eyes; and a quarter of an hour later he had recovered consciousness, and spoke readily, though in a somewhat feeble voice. Of course, I asked what had happened, and for the first time in my life I saw the countess’s marvellous self-possession forsake her. She stammered pitifully, looking at her husband with a most frightened air, as if she wished to read in his eyes what she should say. He undertook to answer me; but he, also, was evidently very much embarrassed. He said, that being left alone, and feeling better than usual, he had taken it into his head to try his strength. He had risen, put on his dressing-gown, and gone down stairs, but, in the act of entering the room, he had become dizzy, and had unfortunately fallen so as to hurt his forehead against the sharp corner of a table. I pretended to believe him, and replied, ‘You have done a very imprudent thing, and it must not happen again.’ Then he looked at his wife in a very singular way, and answered, ‘Oh! you may be sure I shall not be guilty of a similar imprudence. I do so want to get well. I have never wished it so much as now.’”

M. Folgat was on the point of speaking, but the doctor raised his hand. “Waite, I have not done yet,” he said. And, manipulating his spectacles most assiduously, he continued,—“I was about returning home, when suddenly a chambermaid came in with a frightened air to tell the countess that her elder daughter, little Martha, had just been seized with terrible convulsions. Of course I went to see her, and found her suffering from a truly fearful nervous attack. It was only with great difficulty that I could quiet her; and when I thought she had recovered, suspecting that there might be some connection between her attack and the accident that had befallen her father, I said in the most paternal tone I could assume, ‘Now, my child, you must tell me what was the matter.’ She hesitated a while, but eventually replied, ‘I was fright-

ened.' — 'Frightened at what, my darling?' She raised herself on the bed, trying to consult her mother's eyes; but I had placed myself between them, so that they could not see each other. When I repeated my question, she said, 'Well, you see, I had just gone to bed, when I heard the bell ring. I got up, and went to the window to see who could be coming so late. I saw the servant go and open the gate, and come back to the house, followed by a gentleman whom I did not know.' The countess interrupted her here, saying, 'It was a messenger from the court, who was sent to me with an urgent letter.' I pretended not to hear her; and still turning towards Martha, I asked again, 'And it was this gentleman who frightened you so?' — 'Oh, no!' — 'What, then?' I paused for a reply, and glanced aside at the countess. She seemed to be terribly embarrassed. Still she did not dare to stop her daughter. 'Well, doctor,' said the little girl, 'no sooner had the gentleman gone into the house than I saw one of the statues under the trees there come down from its pedestal, and glide very quietly along the avenue.'"

M. Folgat here interposed with the remark, "Do you remember, doctor, the day we were questioning little Martha, she said she was terribly frightened by the statues in the garden?"

"Yes, indeed!" replied the doctor. "But wait a while. The countess promptly interrupted her daughter, saying to me, 'But, dear doctor, you ought to forbid the child to have such notions in her head. At Valpinson she never was afraid, and used to go at night time all over the house quite alone and even without a light. Here, however, she is frightened at everything; and as soon as night comes, she fancies the garden is full of ghosts. You are too big now, Martha, to think that statues, which are made of stone, can come to life and walk about.' The child was shuddering. 'The other times, mamma,' she said, 'I was not quite sure; but this time I am sure. I wanted to go away from the window, and couldn't. I saw it all, saw it perfectly. I saw the statue,—the ghost,—come up the avenue slowly and cautiously, and then place itself behind the last tree, the one that is nearest to the parlour-window. Next I heard a loud cry, and then nothing more. The ghost remained all the time behind the tree, and I saw all it did; it turned to the left and to the

right; it drew itself up; and it crouched down. Then, all of a sudden, I heard two terrible cries; O mamma, such cries! Then the ghost raised one arm, this way, and the next moment it had gone; but immediately afterwards another one came out, and disappeared too.' ”

M. Folgat seemed overcome with amazement. “Oh, these ghosts!” he said.

“You suspect them, do you? I suspected them at once. Still I pretended to turn Martha’s whole story into a joke, and tried to explain to her how the darkness makes us liable to all kinds of optical illusions; so that when I left, the countess was evidently quite sure I had no suspicions. In fact I had none, my ideas were not suspicions but certainties. Accordingly, as soon as I got into the garden, I dropped a piece of money which I had kept in my hand on purpose. Of course I set to work looking for it at the foot of the tree nearest to the parlour-window, while the servant who was showing me out helped me with his lantern. Well, M. Folgat, I can assure you that it was not a ghost that had been walking about under the trees; and, if the footmarks which I found there were made by a statue, that statue must have enormous feet, and wear huge iron-shod shoes.”

The young advocate was prepared for this conclusion. “There is no doubt about it,” he remarked. “The scene had a witness.”

XXIX.

“WHAT scene? What witness? That is what I wanted to hear from you, and why I was waiting for you, so impatiently,” said Dr. Seignebois. “I have seen and stated the results: now it is for you to give me the cause.”

Nevertheless, he did not seem to be in the least surprised when the young advocate recounted Jacques’s desperate enterprise, and the scene it gave rise to. As soon as he had heard all, he exclaimed,—“I thought so: yes, upon my word! By racking my brains all night long, I very nearly guessed the whole story. And who in Jacques’s place, would not have been desirous of making one last effort? But fate is certainly against him.”

“Who knows?” said M. Folgat. And, without giving the doctor time to reply, he proceeded,—“In what are our

chances worse than they were before ! In no way. To-day, just as well as yesterday we can lay our hands upon the proofs which we know to exist, and which would save us. Who knows but that at this moment Sir Francis Burnett and Suky Wood may not have been found ? Is your confidence in Goudar shaken ? ”

“ Oh, as to that, not at all ! I saw him this morning at the hospital, when I paid my usual visit ; and he found an opportunity to tell me that he was almost certain of success. I feel persuaded Cocoleu will speak. But will he speak in time ? That is the question. Ah, if we had but a month before us, I should say Jacques is safe. But our hours are numbered you know. The case will come on next week. I am told the presiding judge has already arrived, and M. du Lopt de la Gransiere has engaged rooms at the hotel. What do you mean to do if nothing fresh occurs in the mean time ? ”

“ We shall adhere to the plan of defence we formed. ”

“ And if the Count de Claudieuse carries out his threat, and declares that he recognised Jacques in the act of firing at him ? ”

“ We shall say he is mistaken. ”

“ And Jacques will be condemned. ”

“ So be it ! ” said the young advocate. And lowering his voice, as if he did not wish to be overheard, he added, — “ Only the sentence will not be a final one. Ah, do not interrupt me, doctor, and upon your life, upon Jacques’s life, do not say a word of what I am going to tell you. If a suspicion crossed M. Galpin’s mind my last hope would be destroyed. He would have the opportunity for correcting a blunder which he has committed, and which justifies me in saying that, even if the court should give evidence, even if sentence should be passed, nothing would be lost yet. ” M. Folgat was growing more and more animated, and his accent and his gestures indicated that he was sure of himself. “ No, ” he repeated, “ nothing would be lost ; and then we should have time before us, while waiting for a second trial, to hunt up our witnesses, and force Cocoleu to tell the truth. Let the count say what he chooses, I like it all the better : I shall thus be relieved of my last scruples. It seemed to me odious to betray the countess, because I thought the one most cruelly punished would be the count. But, if the count attacks us, we must defer d

ourselves; and public opinion will be on our side. More than that, people will admire us for having sacrificed our honour for a woman's honour, and for having allowed ourselves to be condemned rather than disclose her name.

The physician did not seem to be convinced; but the young advocate paid no regard to the point. "Our success in a second trial would be almost certain," he resumed. "The scene in the Rue Mautrec has had a witness: his iron-shod shoes have left, as you say, their marks under the linden-tree nearest to the parlour-window, and little Martha watched his movements. Who can this witness be, but Frumence? Well we shall lay hands upon him. He was standing so that he could see everything, and hear every word. He will tell what he saw and what he heard. He will tell how the Count de Claudieuse called out to M. de Boiscoran, 'No, I do not want to kill you! I have a surer vengeance than that: you shall go to the galleys.'"

Dr. Seignebos shook his head as he rejoined, "I hope your expectations may be realized, my dear sir."

At this moment a servant knocked at the door. One of the doctor's patients had sent for him to come at once. Accordingly M. Folgat took his leave and hurried home as fast as he could. He found two letters waiting for him, one from Madame Goudar, and the other from the agent who had been sent to England. The former was of no importance, for Madame Goudar only asked him to give her husband a note, which she enclosed. The second, on the other hand, was of great interest, for the agent wrote, "Not without many difficulties, and especially not without a heavy outlay of money, I have at length discovered Sir Francis Burnett's brother in London, he who was formerly connected with the firm of Gilmour and Benson. Our Sir Francis is not dead. He has gone to Madras, to attend to important financial matters, and is expected home by the next mail steamer. We shall be informed of his arrival on the very day he lands. I have had less trouble in discovering Suky Wood's family. They keep a sailors' tavern at Folkestone. They had news from their daughter about three weeks ago; but, although they profess to be very much attached to her, they could not tell me accurately where she was just now. All they know is, that she is in Jersey, acting as a barmaid in a public-house. Still that is

enough for me. The island is not large ; and I know it very well, having gone there once before in pursuit of a notary, who had absconded with his client's money. Consequently you may consider Suky as safe. When you receive this letter, I shall already be on my way to Jersey.

"Send some money there to the Golden Apple Hotel, St. Heliers, where I propose to lodge. Living is amazingly dear in London ; and I have very little left to the sum you gave me on starting."

In this direction at least, everything seemed going well, and, elated by this first success, M. Folgat slipped a thousand-franc note into an envelope, directed it as desired, and sent it at once to the post-office. Then he asked M. de Chandore to lend him his carriage, and went over to Bois-coran where he wished to see Michael the tenant's son—the young fellow who had been so prompt in finding Cocoléu, and bringing him to town. He found him, fortunately, just coming home, with a cart laden with straw ; and taking him aside, he at once asked him to render M. de Bois-coran a great service.

"What is it ?" asked the young fellow, in a tone of voice which implied that he was ready to do anything.

"Do you know Frumence Cheminot ?" asked M. Folgat.

"He who used to live at La Tremblade ?"

"Exactly."

"Then upon my word I do know him ! He has stolen enough of our apples, the scamp ! But I don't blame him so much, after all ; for he is a good fellow in spite of his vagabond ways."

"He was in prison at Sauveterre."

"Yes, I know : he had broken down a gate near Brechy, and—"

"Well, he has escaped."

"Ah, the scamp !"

"And we must find him again. They have put the gendarmes on his track ; but will they catch him ?"

Michael burst out laughing. "Never !" he said. "Frumence will make his way to Oleron, where he has friends : the gendarmes will look for him in vain."

M. Folgat slapped Michael amicably on the shoulder, and said,—“But you, if you choose ? Oh ! don't look angry. We don't want to have him arrested. All I want you to

do is to hand him a letter from me, and to bring back his answer."

"If that's all, then I'm your man. Just give me time to change my clothes, and to let father know, and I'll be off."

Thus it was that M. Folgat prepared for future action, trying to counterbalance the cunning measures of the prosecution by such combinations as his experience and skill suggested.

Meanwhile everybody around him was in despair; and M. de Chandore's house, once so full of life and merriment, had become as silent and gloomy as a tomb. The last two months had made the baron an old man in good earnest. He looked bent and broken; he walked with difficulty, and his hands began to tremble. The change in the Marquis de Boiscoran was even greater. He, who a few weeks before had looked robust and hearty, now appeared almost decrepit. He scarcely ate, and hardly slept at all. He was growing frightfully thin, and it pained him to speak. As for the marchioness, she lived in agony. She had heard M. Magloire say that Jacques's safety would have been assured beyond all doubt if they had succeeded in obtaining a change of venue, or an adjournment of the trial. And the thought that it was her fault such a change had not been applied for, was death to her. She had hardly strength enough left to drag herself every day as far as the jail to see her son. The two Demoiselles de Lavarande had to bear with all the difficulties arising from the state of things, and they went about looking as pale as ghosts, conversing in whispers, and walking on tiptoe, as if there had been a death in the house.

Denise alone showed greater energy as the troubles increased; though at the same time she did not indulge in much hope. "I know Jacques will be condemned," she said to M. Folgat. But she added that despair belonged only to criminals, and that the fatal mistake for which Jacques was likely to suffer ought to inspire his friends with nothing but indignation against his accusers. While her grandfather and the Marquis de Boiscoran went out as little as possible, she took pains to show herself in the town, astonishing the ladies in good society by the calm way in which she received their false expressions of sympathy. Still it was evident that fever alone sustained

her, imparting a slight colour to her cheeks, and brilliancy to her eyes. It was mainly for her sake that M. Folgat longed to end the uncertainty which preyed more and more on everybody's mind.

The time was drawing near. As Dr. Seignebos had announced, the presiding judge of the assizes, M. Domini, had already arrived at Sauveterre. He was one of those men whose character is an honour to the bench, a man impressed with the dignity of his profession, though not considering himself infallible. Firm without useless rigour, apparently cold and yet kind-hearted, his only mistress was justice, and his only ambition was to establish the truth. He had examined Jacques, as he was bound to do; but the examination had been, as it always is, a mere formality, and had led to no result. The next step was the selection of the jury. Those liable to serve in the box had already begun to arrive from various parts of the department. They mostly lodged at the Hotel de France, taking their meals in common in the large back dining-room, which is always specially reserved for their use at session time. In the afternoon they might be seen walking together in groups on the Place du Marche Neuf, or round about the old ramparts. M. du Lopt de la Gransiere had also arrived. But he kept strictly in retirement in his room at the Hotel de la Poste, where, he spent several hours every day in close conference with M. Galpin-Daveline.

The assizes were to open on the Monday, three days being devoted to a number of minor cases. At the conclusion of these the presiding judge had decided to deal with the Valpinson affair. The townsfolk brought great pressure to bear on all who were in any way connected with the court, with the view of obtaining tickets of admission to witness the trial; and people who had latterly avoided M. Galpin-Daveline, now stopped him in the street, and begged for cards. Some few tickets fell into the hands of speculators who boldly sold them for money; and one family actually had the audacity to write to the Marquis de Boiscoran for three admissions, promising in return to contribute to his son's acquittal "by their attitude in court."

While all this was going on, the town was somewhat surprised by the distribution of a subscription list on behalf of the families of the unfortunate firemen who had per-

ished in the fire at Valpinson. Who had originated this proceeding, no one could say. M. Seneschal tried in vain to discover, but the secret of the treacherous move was well kept. It was evidently designed to revive on the very eve of the trial the mournful memories and bitter hatred which had been allowed to slumber until that moment. "That man Galpin has had a hand in it," said Dr. Seignebos. "And to think that he may after all be triumphant! Ah, why did not Goudar commence his experiment a little sooner?"

For Goudar, while still maintaining that he was certain of success, asked for time. To disarm the mistrust of an idiot like Cocoleu was not the work of a day or of a week. He declared that, if he were over-hasty, failure would inevitably ensue.

Regarding other points it should be mentioned that the Count de Claudieuse was getting rather better; while the agent in Jersey had telegraphed that he was on Suky's track, and that he should certainly find her, but could not say when. Finally, Michael had been all over the isle of Oleron, but contrary to his expectations no one had been able to give him any news of Frumence.

Such was the situation when, on the opening day of the assizes, a general council was held by Jacques's intimate friends and relatives. It was here resolved that his advocates should not mention the name of the Countess de Claudieuse, and that, even if the count offered to give evidence, they should adhere to the plan of defence suggested by M. Folgat. Alas! the chances of success seemed to diminish every hour, for the jury—contrary to the general rule at Sauveterre—were showing themselves excessively severe to all the accused. A man who had killed another after receiving great provocation, could not even obtain the plea of "extenuating circumstances," and was condemned to death. Meanwhile it was decided that M. de Chandore and the Marquis and the Marchioness de Bois-coran should attend the trial. They wished to spare Denise the terrible excitement she would necessarily undergo if she were present; but she declared that if they refused to take her with them, she would go to the Palace de Justice by herself; and they were forced to submit to her will.

Thanks to an order from M. Domini, M. Folgat and M.

Magloire were able to spend the last evening with Jacques in order to settle all matters of detail. The prisoner looked excessively pale, but he was quite composed. And when his counsel left him, telling him to keep up both his hope and his courage, he replied, "Hope I have none; but courage—I assure you that will not fail me!"

XXX.

AT last through the single grated window of his dark cell, Jacques de Boiscoran saw the day break that was to decide his fate.

No fuller account of the events which transpired on this occasion could be given than that which appeared in the columns of the "*Independant de Sauveterre*." Although a morning paper, it published, "owing to the gravity of the circumstances," a special evening edition, which a dozen newsboys hawked about the streets till midnight, and wherein one read as follows:—

THE SAUVETERRE ASSIZES.

Presiding Judge.—M. Domini.

ASSASSINATION! INCENDIARISM!

[*From our Special Reporter.*]

Whence arises this unusual commotion, uproar, and excitement, in our ordinarily peaceful town? Whence these gatherings on our public squares, these groups before all the houses? Whence this agitation on all faces, this anxiety in all eyes? It is because the terrible Valpinson drama, which has for so long disturbed our peace, is at last to be publicly investigated. To-day the man charged with these fearful crimes is to take his seat in the dock. Hence all steps are eagerly turned towards the Palais de Justice, which long before daylight is surrounded by an eager multitude, whom the constables and gendarmes can only control with difficulty. The people press and crowd and violently push. Coarse words fly to and fro. Gestures follow and then blows. A disturbance is imminent. Women cry, men swear, and two peasants from Brechy are eventually arrested. It is well known that only a few people will be fortunate enough to secure admission. The

great Place itself cannot contain all these curious people, who have come from every part of the district : and how could it be expected that the court-room would hold them ?

And still the authorities have resorted to heroic measures ; and have even had two partition walls taken down, so that a part of the great hall is added to the court-room proper. M. Lautier, the town architect, who is a good judge in such matters, assures us that this immense space will accommodate twelve hundred persons. But what are twelve hundred persons ? Long before the hour fixed for the opening of the sitting, the court is full to overflowing. A pin might be thrown into the room, and it could not fall to the ground. Not an inch of space is lost. All around, along the wall, men are standing in close ranks. On both sides of the platform are chairs occupied by a large number of ladies belonging to the best society, not only of Sauveterre, but of all the neighbouring localities. Some of these representatives of the fair sex appear in magnificent toilettes.

A thousand reports are current, a thousand conjectures are formed, but these we need not report. Let us say, however, that the accused has not availed himself of his right to reject a certain number of jurymen. He has accepted all the names which were drawn by lot, and which the prosecuting attorney did not object to. We obtain this information from a legal gentleman, a friend of ours, who has scarcely spoken when a great noise arises at the door, followed by a rapid moving of chairs, and half-smothered exclamations. All eyes are turned to witness the entrance of the prisoner's relatives and friends, who walk towards the seats assigned them close by the platform.

The Marquis de Boiscoran accompanies Mademoiselle de Chandore, who wears a dark gray dress, trimmed with cherry-coloured ribbons ; and M. de Chandore escorts the Marchioness de Boiscoran. Both the marquis and the baron look cold and reserved ; while the prisoner's mother appears utterly overcome. Mademoiselle Chandore on the contrary, is in good spirits. She does not seem in the least concerned, and returns with a bright smile the few greetings she receives from various parts of the court-room. But the party are soon no longer an object of curiosity. Everybody's attention is directed towards a large table in front of where the judges sit, and on which are a

number of articles covered by a large red cloth. These articles are to be used as evidence against the prisoner. In the meantime it strikes eleven o'clock. The ushers move about, seeing that everything is in order; then all of a sudden a little door on the left hand opens, and the counsel for the defence enter the court. Our readers know them. One is M. Magloire, the ornament of our bar; the other, an advocate from the capital, M. Folgat, young, but already famous. M. Magloire looks at his best, and smilingly converses with the mayor of Sauveterre; while M. Folgat opens his leather case, and consults his papers.

It is half-past eleven, and an usher announces in stentorian tones, "The court." M. Domini takes the presidential chair, while M. du Lopt de la Gransiere occupies the seat reserved to the prosecuting counsel. Behind them sit the jurymen, looking grave and solemn.

All of a sudden a great tumult arises. The spectators hurriedly spring to their feet; those occupying the back places even mount upon their chairs. All eyes are turned towards a door facing the bench. This sensation has been caused by an order of the presiding judge. He has instructed the chief usher to have the prisoner brought in.

At last Jacques de Boiscoran appears. He is dressed in black from head to foot, and it is noticed that he wears in his buttonhole the ribbon of the Legion of Honour. He looks pale: but his glance is clear and open, full of confidence, yet not defiant. His carriage is proud, though melancholy. Scarcely has he taken his seat than a gentleman passes over three rows of chairs, and, in spite of the officers of the court, succeeds in shaking hands with him. This is Dr. Seignebos.

The president orders the ushers to proclaim silence: and, after having reminded the audience that all expression of approbation or disapprobation are strictly prohibited, he turns to the accused, saying,—“Tell me your christian names, your family name, your age, your profession, and your place of residence.”

The accused replies,—“Louis Trivulce Jacques de Boiscoran, twenty-seven years old, land-owner, residing at Boiscoran, district of Sauveterre.”

“Sit down, and listen to the charges which are brought against you,” rejoined the presiding judge, whereupon the clerk, M. Mechinet, proceeded to read the charges, which,

in their terrible simplicity, cause a shudder to pass through the whole audience. We shall not repeat them here, as all the incidents are well known. Directly they are read, the prisoner's examination begins as follows :

President.—"Accused, rise and answer clearly. During the preliminary investigation, you refused to answer several questions. Now the matter must be cleared up. And I am bound to tell you that it is to your interest to answer frankly."

Accused.—"No one desires more than I do that the truth be known. I am ready to answer."

"Why were you so reticent in your first examination?"

—"I thought it important for my own interests to answer only in court."

"You have heard the crimes of which you are accused?"

—"I am innocent. And, first of all, allow me to say one thing. The crime committed at Valpinson is an atrocious, cowardly crime; but it is at the same time an absurdly insensate one, resembling the unconscious act of a madman. Now, it has never been denied that I possess the ordinary measure of intelligence."

"You discuss, you do not answer."—"But, Monsieur!"

"Hereafter you will have full liberty to argue. For the present, you must content yourself with answering my questions. Were you not about to be married soon?"—At this question all eyes are turned towards Mademoiselle de Chandore, who although she blushes till she is as red as a poppy, does not lower her eyelids. The accused replies in a low voice, "Yes, I was."

"Did you not write to your betrothed a few hours before the crime was committed?"—"Yes, sir; and I sent my letter by one of my tenants' sons named Michael."

"What was it that you wrote to her?"—"That important business would prevent me from spending the evening with her."

"What was that business? Tell us the truth. You were asked this same question during the preliminary investigation, and you replied that you went to Brechy to see your wood merchant."—"I did indeed make that reply on the spur of the moment, it was not correct."

"Why did you tell a falsehood?"—(With an expression of indignation, which is noticed by all)—"I could not be

lieve that I was in danger. It seemed to me impossible that I should be the object of an accusation, which, nevertheless, has brought me into this court. Hence I did not deem it necessary to make my private affairs public."

"But you very soon found out that you were in danger?"—"Yes, I did."

"Why did you not tell the truth then?"—"Because the magistrate who carried on the investigation had been too intimate a friend of mine to inspire me with confidence."

"Explain yourself more fully."—"I must ask leave to say no more. In speaking of M. Galpin-Davelin, I might be found wanting in moderation."

A low murmur ensues at this reply, drawing from the president the remark, "Such murmurs are improper, and I remind the audience of the respect due to the court."

M. du Lopt de la Gransiere, the advocate-general, then rises,—“We cannot,” he says, “tolerate such recriminations against a magistrate who has nobly performed his duty, despite the grief it caused him. If the accused had well-founded objections to this magistrate, why did he not make them known? He cannot plead ignorance: he knows the law, he has passed the legal examination necessary to be called to the bar. His counsel, moreover are men of experience.”

These observations draw forth a retort from M. Magloire. “We were of opinion,” says he, “that the accused ought to ask for a change of venue. He declined to follow our advice, being confident that his cause was a good one.”

“The jury will know how to appreciate this system,” remarks the advocate-general, resuming his seat.

Then the president turns again to the accused. “And now,” asks he, “are you ready to tell the truth concerning the business which prevented you from spending the evening with your betrothed?”—"Yes, sir. My wedding was to take place at Brechy church, and I had to make the necessary arrangements for the ceremony with the priest. I had, besides, to fulfil certain religious duties. The priest of Brechy, who is a friend of mine, will tell you, that, although no day had been fixed, it had been agreed between us, since he insisted upon it, that I should go to confession one evening that week.”

The audience, which had been expecting some exciting

revelation, seems much disappointed by this reply, and ironical laughter is heard in various parts of the court. "This laughter is indecent and objectionable," exclaimed the president severely, "usher, remove the persons who presume to laugh. And once more I give notice, that, at the first interruption, I shall order the court to be cleared." Then turning again to the accused, he adds, "Proceed!"—"That evening, therefore, I went to call on the priest at Brechy. Unluckily there was no one at home at the parsonage when I got there. I was ringing the bell for the third or fourth time, when a little peasant-girl who came by, told me that she had just met the priest at the Ca-fourche des Marechaux. I hastened at once in that direction, thinking to find him. But I walked more than four miles without meeting him, and then coming to the conclusion that the girl must have been mistaken, I went home again."

"Is that your explanation?"—"Yes."

"And you think it is a plausible one?"—"I have not promised to say what is plausible, but what is true. I may confess, however, that, precisely because the explanation is so simple, I did not venture to give it at first. And yet if no crime had been committed, and I had said the day afterwards, 'Yesterday, I went to see the priest at Brechy, and did not find him at home,' who would have discovered anything remarkable in my statement?"

"And, in order to fulfil so simple a duty, you chose a roundabout way, which is not only difficult, but actually dangerous, right across the swamps?"—"I chose the shortest way."

"Then, why were you so frightened when meeting young Ribot at the Seille Canal?"—"I was not frightened, but simply surprised, as one is apt to be when suddenly meeting a man where no one is expected. And, if I was surprised, young Ribot was not less so."

"You say that you hoped to meet no one?"—"Pardon me, I did not say so. To expect is not the same as to hope."

"Why, then, did you take such pains to explain your being there?"—"I gave no explanations. It was young Ribot who at first told me, laughingly, where he was going, and then I replied that I was bound for Brechy."

"You told him, also, that you were going through the

marshes to shoot birds; and at the same time you showed him your gun?"—"That may be. But is that any proof against me? I think just the contrary. If I had had such criminal intentions as the prosecution suggests, I should certainly have gone back after meeting any one, knowing that having been seen; I was necessarily exposed to great danger. But I was only going to see my friend, the priest."

"And for such a visit you took your gun with you?"—"My land extends through the woods and marshes; and there was not a day I did not bag a rabbit or a waterfowl. Everybody in the neighbourhood will tell you that I never went out without a gun."

"And on your way back, why did you go through the forest of Rochepommier?"—"Because from the spot I had reached it was probably the shortest way to Boiscoran. I say probably; because just then I did not think much about it. A man who is taking a walk would be very much embarrassed, in the majority of cases, if he had to give a precise account why he took one road rather than another."

"You were seen in the forest by a woodcutter, called Gaudry?"—"So I was told by the magistrate."

"That witness declares that you were in a state of great excitement. You were tearing the leaves from the branches of the trees, and talking loudly."—"I certainly was very much vexed at having lost my evening, and particularly so at having relied on the little peasant girl. It is quite possible I may have exclaimed, as I walked along, 'Plague upon my friend, the priest, who goes and dines in town!' or some such words."

There is a smile in the assembly, but not such as to attract the president's attention. "You know then," he says, "that the priest at Brechy was dining out that day?"

At these words, M. Magloire rises from his seat—"It is through us, sir," he replied, "that the accused has learnt this fact. When he informed us how he had spent the evening, we went to see the priest at Brechy, who told us how it came about that neither he nor his old servant was at the parsonage. At our request the priest has been summoned. We shall also produce another priest, who at that time passed by the Cafourche des Marechaux, and who was the one of the little girl had seen."

Having made a sign to the counsel to sit down again, the president once more turns to the accused and remarks, "The woman Courtois who met you deposes that you looked very strange. You did not speak to her: in fact you were in great haste to get away from her."—"The night was much too dark for the woman to see my face. She asked me to render her a slight service, and I did so. I did not speak to her, because I had nothing to say. I did not leave her suddenly, but only got ahead of her because her ass walked very slowly."

At a sign from the president, the ushers now remove the red cloth which had hitherto covered the objects on the table. Great curiosity is manifested by the whole audience; people rise from their seats and stretch their necks so as to see the better. On the table are displayed various articles of clothing, a pair of gray velveteen trousers, a shooting-jacket of maroon velveteen, an old straw hat, and a pair of dun-coloured leather boots. By their side lie several packages of cartridges, a double-barrelled gun, two bowls filled with small-shot, and, finally, a large china basin, with a dark sediment at the bottom. Pointing to these objects the president now asks the prisoner, "Are those the clothes which you wore the evening of the crime?"—"Yes, sir."

"A curious costume in which to visit a venerable ecclesiastic, and to perform religious duties."—"The priest at Brechy was my friend. Our intimacy will explain, even if it does not justify, the liberty I took."

"Do you also recognise this basin? The water has been allowed to evaporate, and the residue alone remains at the bottom."—"It is true, that, when the investigating magistrate arrived at my house, he found this basin full of dark water, which was thick with half-burnt *debris*. He asked me about this water, and I did not hesitate a moment to tell him that I had washed my hands in it the evening before, after my return home. Is it not evident, that, if I had been guilty, my first effort would have been to do away with all traces of my crime? And yet this circumstance is looked upon as the strongest evidence of my guilt, and the prosecution produces it as the most serious charge against me."

"It is very strong and most serious."—"Well, nothing admits of an easier explanation. I am a great smoker.

When I left home the evening of the crime, I took several cigars with me ; but, when I wanted to light one, I found I had no matches.

At this moment, M. Magloire rises again, and says,—“ I wish to point out that this is not one of those explanations which are invented, after the fact, to meet the necessities of a double cause. We have absolute and overwhelming proof of its truth, M. de Boiscoran did not have the little match-box which he usually carries about him, for he had left it at M. de Chandore’s house, on the mantel-piece, where I have seen it, and where it still is.”

“ That is sufficient, M. Magloire. Let the prisoner proceed.”—“ I wanted to smoke ; and so I resorted to an expedient, which all sportsmen are familiar with. I tore one of my cartridges open, removed the lead, put a piece of paper inside, and set it on fire.”

“ And you get a light by this means ? ”—“ Not always, but certainly in one instance out of three.”

“ And the operation blackens the hands ? ”—“ Not the operation itself. But, when I had lit my cigar, I could not throw away the burning paper as it was : I might have kindled a regular fire.”

“ In the marshes ? ”—“ But, sir, remember I have smoked five or six cigars during the evening, which means that I had to repeat the operation a dozen times at least, and in different places,—in the woods and on the high-road. Each time I had to extinguish the fire with my fingers ; and, as the powder is always greasy, my hands naturally soon became as black as a charcoal-burner’s.”

The accused gives this explanation in a perfectly natural but rather excited manner, which makes a great impression. The examination proceeds.

“ Let us deal with your gun. Do you recognise it ? ”—“ Yes, sir. May I look at it ? ”

Receiving an affirmative reply, the accused eagerly takes up the gun, snaps the two cocks, and puts one of his fingers inside the barrels. He turns crimson, and, bending down to his counsel, says a few words to them so quickly and so low, that they do not reach us.

“ What is the matter ? ” inquires the president.

M. Magloire rising, replies, “ A fact has now been ascertained which at once establishes M. de Boiscoran’s innocence. By providential intercession, his servant Anthony

cleaned this gun two days before the crime was committed. It appears now that one of the barrels is still clean, and in good condition. Hence it cannot be M. de Boiscoran who fired twice at the Count de Claudieuse."

While his advocate is speaking the accused advances to the table on which his clothes and the other objects are lying. He wraps his handkerchief round the ramrod, slips it into one of the barrels, draws it out again, and shows that it is hardly soiled. The whole audience becomes greatly excited. The president orders him to do the same thing with the other barrel. The accused obeys. His handkerchief remains clean.

"You see," says the president, "you have told us that you burnt, perhaps, a dozen cartridges to light your cigars. But the prosecution had foreseen this objection, and they are prepared to meet it. Usher, call the witness, Maucroy."

Our readers all know this gentleman, whose fine collection of fire arms, sporting-articles, and fishing tackle is one of the ornaments of the Place du Marche Neuf. Directly he has taken the oath, the president calls on him to repeat the statements he has made regarding M. de Boiscoran's gun. He declares that it is an excellent weapon. Thanks, however, to a peculiar arrangement of the cartridges and to the special nature of the fulminating material, the barrels hardly ever become foul.—Hereupon the accused eagerly exclaims, "You are mistaken, sir. I have myself cleaned my gun frequently: and I have, contrary to what you say, found the barrels extremely foul.

Witness.—"Because you had fired too many charges. But I mean to say that you can use two or three cartridges without a trace being left in the barrels."

Accused.—"I deny that positively."

President to witness.—"And if a dozen cartridges were burnt?"—"Oh, then, the barrels would be very foul."

"Examine the barrels, and tell us what you find."—*After a minute examination.* "I declare that two cartridges cannot have been used since the gun was cleaned."

President to the accused.—"Well, then, what becomes of the dozen cartridges you used to light your cigars, and which blackened your hands so much?" At these words, the prisoner, whose firmness and composed manner have hitherto been the subject of general comment, grows ex-

tremely pale, and does not answer. It is M. Magloire who speaks,—“The question,” says he, “is too serious to be left entirely in the hands of a single witness.”

“We only desire the truth,” responds the advocate-general. “It is easy to make an experiment.”

Witness.—“Oh, certainly!”

President.—“Then let it be done.”

The witness puts a cartridge into each barrel, and goes to the window. The sudden explosion is followed by the screams of several ladies. The witness returns and shows that the barrels are no more foul than they were before. “Well, you see that I was right,” he says.

The president now addresses himself to the accused: “This circumstance on which you relied so securely, far from helping you, only proves that your explanation of the blackened state of your hands was a falsehood.” M. Domino then orders the witness to retire and the examination of the accused is continued.

“What were your relations with Count de Claudieuse?”
—“We had no intercourse with each other.”

“But your aversion to him was well known all over the country?”—“That is a mistake. I declare, upon my honour, that I always looked upon him as the best and most honourable of men.”

“There, at least, you agree with all who know him. Still you are at law with him?”—“I have inherited a suit from my uncle, together with his fortune. I have carried it on, but very quietly. I asked for nothing better than a compromise.”

“And, when the Count de Claudieuse refused, you were incensed?”—“No.”

“Yes, you were, indeed you were so irritated that you once actually pointed your gun at him. At another time you said, ‘He will not leave me alone till I put a bullet into his head.’ Do not deny! You will hear what the witnesses say.”

In obedience to the president’s orders, the accused now resumes his seat. He looks as confident as ever, and carries his head high. He has entirely overcome any feeling of discouragement, and converses with his counsel in the most composed manner. Undoubtedly at this stage of the proceedings, public opinion is on his side. He has won the good-will even of those who came here strongly prej-

udiced against him. No one can help being impressed by his proud but mournful expression of countenance ; and all are touched by the extreme simplicity of his answers. Although the discussion concerning the gun has not turned out to his advantage, it does not seem to have injured him. People are eagerly discussing the fouling of guns. A number of incredulous persons, whom the experiment has not convinced, maintain that M. Maucroy has been too rash in his statements.

The proceedings are not exactly suspended ; but there is a pause, whilst the ushers cover the articles on the table once more with the red cloth, and, after several comings and goings, roll a large arm chair into the well of the court—in front of the judges' seat. At last one of the ushers approaches the president, and whispers something into his ear. M. Domini only nods his head, but when the usher has left the hall he says, "We have now to hear the witnesses, and we propose to begin with the Count de Claudieuse. Although seriously indisposed, he has preferred to appear in court."

At these words, Dr. Seignebois is seen to start up, as if he wished to address the court ; but one of his friends, sitting beside him, pulls him down by his coat. M. Folgat makes a sign to him, and he soon resumes his seat. Almost immediately afterwards the Count de Claudieuse enters, supported, indeed, almost carried, by his man-servant. He is greeted by a murmur of sympathetic pity. He is frightfully thin and haggard ; and the whole vitality of his system seems to have centred in his eyes, which shine with extraordinary brilliancy. He takes the oath in an almost inaudible voice. But the silence is so deep, that when the president asks him the usual question, "Do you swear to tell the whole truth ?" and he answers, "I swear," the words are distinctly heard all over the court-room.

President (in a kind tone).—"We are very much obliged to you, sir, for the effort which you have made in coming here. That chair has been brought in for you ; please sit down."

The Count de Claudieuse.—"I thank you, sir ; but I am strong enough to stand."

"Please tell us, then, what you know of the attempt made on your life."—"It might have been eleven o'clock. I had gone to bed a little while before and blown out my

light. I was in that half state which is neither wakefulness nor sleep, when I saw my room lighted up by a dazzling glare. I conjectured it was fire, jumped out of bed, and, only lightly dressed, rushed down the stairs. I found some difficulty in opening the outer door, which I had locked myself. At last I succeeded. But I had no sooner put my foot on the threshold than I felt a terrible pain in my right side, and at the same time I heard an explosion of fire-arms. Instinctively I rushed towards the place whence the shot seemed to have been fired ; but, before I had taken three steps, I was struck once more in the shoulder, and fell down unconscious."

"How long a time was there between the first and the second shot?"—"Almost three or four seconds."

"Was that time enough to distinguish the assassin!"—"Yes, and I saw him run from behind a woodpile, where he had been lying in ambush, and escape into the country."

"You can tell us, no doubt, how he was dressed?"—"Certainly. He had on a pair of light gray trousers, a dark coat, and a large straw hat."

At a sign from the president, and in the midst of the most profound silence, the ushers remove the red cloth from the table. The president points to the garments of the accused and asks, "Does the costume which you describe correspond with those clothes?"—"Yes; for they appear to be the same."

"Did you recognise the assassin?"—"The fire at that moment had made so much progress that it was as bright as daylight, and I recognised M. Jacques de Boiscoran."

This answer was waited for with deep anxiety by every one in the vast audience. Those who glanced at the prisoner perceived that not a muscle in his face moved. Neither did his counsel betray any signs of surprise or emotion. The president and the advocate-general had been intently watching the accused and his lawyers. Did they expect a protest, an answer; probably so. However, as none came, the president turned to the witness and exclaimed, "Your declaration is a most serious one, sir."—"I know its weight," rejoined the count.

"It is entirely different from your first deposition made before the investigating magistrate."—"It is."

"When you were examined a few hours after the crime,

you declared that you had not recognised the assassin. More than that, when M. de Boiscoran's name was mentioned you seemed to be indignant at such a suspicion, and almost offered to guarantee his innocence."—"That was contrary to truth. Imbued with a natural sentiment of commiseration, I tried to save a man who belongs to a highly esteemed family, from disgraceful punishment."

"But now?"—"Now I see that I was wrong, and that the law ought to have its course. And this is my reason for coming here to-day, when I am on the point of appearing before God, in order to tell you that M. de Boiscoran is guilty. I recognised him."

To the accused.—"Do you hear?"

The accused rises. "By all that is dear and sacred to me in the world," he exclaims, "I swear that I am innocent. The Count de Claudieuse says he is about to appeal before God; it is to the justice of God that I appeal."

Sobs almost drown his voice. The Marchioness de Boiscoran is overcome by a nervous attack. She is carried out stiff and inanimate; and Dr. Seignebos and Mademoiselle de Chandore hasten after her. Then turning to the Count de Claudieuse the prisoner cries, "My mother is dying, sir."

Certainly, all those who looked forward to a scene of thrilling interest are not disappointed. Everybody appears overcome with excitement; and many of the ladies shed tears. And yet those who watch the glances which are exchanged between M. de Boiscoran and the Count de Claudieuse cannot help asking themselves, if there is not something else between these two men, besides what the trial has made known. We cannot explain to ourselves the singular tone of these remarks, nor does any one understand the silence observed by M. de Boiscoran's counsel. Do they abandon their client? No; for we see them go up to him, shake hands with him, and lavish upon him every sign of friendly consolation and encouragement. We may even be permitted to say, that, to all appearances, the president himself and the advocate-general are for a moment perfectly overcome with surprise. At all events such is our impression. However the president continues, "I had just been asking the accused, count, whether there was any ground of enmity between you."

The count replies in a steadily declining voice, "I

know no other than our lawsuit about a little stream of water."

"Did not the accused once threaten to fire at you?"—"Yes; but I did not think he was in earnest, and I never resented the matter."

"Do you persist in your declaration?"—"I do. And once more, upon my oath, I declare solemnly that I recognised M. Jacques de Boiscoran in such a manner as to prevent any possible mistake."

It is evidently time that the Count de Claudieuse should conclude his evidence. He begins to totter; his eyes close; his head rolls from side to side and two ushers have to come to his assistance to enable him, with the help of his own servant, to leave the hall. Is the Countess de Claudieuse to be called next? So people think, but it is not so. The countess being kept by the bedside of one of her daughters, who is most dangerously ill, will not be called at all; and the clerk of the court is ordered to read her deposition. Although her description of the terrible event is very graphic, it contains no new facts, and will remain without influence on the proceedings.

The next witness is a young fellow named Ribot,—a good-looking stalwart "village cock," with a pink-and-blue cravat round his neck, and a huge gold chain dangling from his watch-pocket. He seems to be very proud of his appearance, and looks around him with an air of the most perfect self-satisfaction. He relates the circumstances of his meeting with the accused in a tone of great importance. He knows everything and explains everything. With a little encouragement he would, no doubt, declare that the accused had confided to him all his plans of incendiarism and murder. His answers are almost all received with great hilarity, which draw upon the audience another severe reprimand from the president. The witness Gaudry, who succeeds Ribot, is a little wretched-looking man, with a false would-be-timid glance, who exhausts himself in bowing and scraping. Unlike Ribot, he seems to have forgotten everything. It is evident he is afraid of committing himself. He praises the count; but he does not speak the less well of M. de Boiscoran. He assures the court of his profound respect for the bench—for all the ladies and gentlemen present, indeed for every one. The woman Courtois, who comes next, evidently wishes she

were a thousand miles away. The president has to make the greatest efforts to obtain, word by word, her evidence, which after all, amounts to next to nothing.

Then follow two farmers from Brechy, who were present at the violent altercation which ended in M. de Boiscoran aiming his gun at the Count de Claudieuse. The account, interrupted by numberless parentheses, is very obscure. The counsel for the defence requests them to be more explicit: and thereupon they become utterly unintelligible. Besides, they contradict each other. One looked upon the conduct of the accused as a mere jest: while the other considered it so serious that he threw himself between the two noblemen in order to prevent M. de Boiscoran from killing his adversary then and there. Once more the accused energetically protests that he had no animosity against the Count de Claudieuse: there was no reason why he should have. The obstinate peasant insists, however, that a lawsuit is always a sufficient reason for hating a man. And thereupon he undertakes to explain the lawsuit, and how the Count de Claudieuse, by damming the waters of the Seille, overflowed M. de Boiscoran's meadows.

The president at last puts an end to the discussion, and orders another witness to be brought in. This man swears he heard M. de Boiscoran once say, that sooner or later, he would put a ball into the Count de Claudieuse's head. He adds, that the accused is a terrible fellow, who has threatened to shoot people upon the slightest provocation. And, to support his evidence, he states that once before, to the knowledge of the country, M. de Boiscoran really did fire at a man he disliked.

The accused undertakes to explain this circumstance. A scamp—he says—perhaps the very witness in the box, came every night and stole his tenants' fruit and vegetables. One night he kept watch, and gave the thief a load of salt. He does not know whether he hit him. At all events, the rascal never complained, and thus was never found out.

The next witness is a Brechy huissier, who deposes that the Count de Claudieuse, by damming the waters of the Seille, once caused M. de Boiscoran a loss of twenty tons of first-rate hay. He confesses that such a bad neighbour would certainly have exasperated him. The advocate-general does not deny the facts, but adds that the Count de Claudieuse offered to pay damages. However, M. de

Boiscoran refused the offer with insulting haughtiness. The accused replies, that he refused upon his lawyer's advice, but that he did not use insulting words.

Next come the witnesses summoned by the defence. The first is the reverend priest from Brechy, who confirms the statement made by the accused. On the evening of the crime he was dining at the house of M. de Besson; his servant had come for him; and the parsonage was deserted. He states that he had really arranged with M. de Boiscoran that the latter should come some evening that week to fulfil the religious duties which the church requires before it allows a marriage to be consecrated. He has known Jacques de Boiscoran since he was a child, and knows no better and no more honourable man. In his opinion, the hatred, of which so much has been said, never had any existence. He cannot believe, and does not believe, that the accused is guilty. The second witness is the priest of an adjoining parish. He states, that between nine and ten o'clock, he was on the road, near the Cafourche des Marechaux. The night was quite dark. He is of the same height as the priest of Brechy: and the little girl might very well have taken him for the latter and thus have misled M. de Boiscoran. Three other minor witnesses are next heard, and then it is that the advocate-general begins his speech.

M. du Lopt de la Gransiere's eloquence is so widely known, and so justly appreciated, that we need not refer to it here. We will only say that he surpassed himself on this occasion; for during more than an hour his address held the large assembly in anxious and breathless suspense, and caused all hearts to vibrate with the most intense excitement. He commences with a description of Valpinson, this poetic and charming residence, where the noble old trees of Rochepommier are mirrored in the crystal waters of the Seille. "There," he exclaims,—“there lived the Count and the Countess de Claudieuse,—he one of those noblemen of a past age who worshipped honour, and were devoted to duty; she one of those women who are the glory of their sex, and the perfect model of all domestic virtues. Heaven had blessed their union, and given them two children, to whom they were tenderly attached. Fortune smiled upon their wise efforts. Esteemed by all, cherished, and revered, they lived happy.

and might have counted upon long years of prosperity. But no. It was not to be. Hate was hovering over them.

"One evening, a fatal glare arouses the count. He rushes out; he hears the report of a gun. He hears it a second time, and he sinks down, bathed in his life's blood. The countess also is alarmed by the explosion, and hastens to the spot: she stumbles; she sees the lifeless body of her husband, and sinks unconscious to the ground. Are the children also to perish? No. Providence watches. A flash of intelligence pierces an idiot's brain. He rushes through the flames, and snatches the children from the fire that was already threatening their couch. The lives of the inmates are saved; but the fire continues its destructive march. At the sound of the terrible fire-bell, all the inhabitants of the neighbouring villages hurry to the spot. But there is no one to direct their efforts; there are no engines, and they can do nothing. But suddenly a distant rumble revives hope in their hearts. The fire-engines are approaching. They reach the spot; and whatever men can do is done at once.

"But great God! What are those cries of horror which suddenly arise on all sides? The roof of the house is falling, it buries under its ruins two zealous and courageous men,—Bolton the drummer, who but just now summoned his neighbours to come to the rescue, and Guillebauld, a father with five children. High above the crash and the hiss of the flames rise their heart-rending cries. They call for help. Will they be allowed to perish? A gendarme rushes forward, and with him a farmer from Brechy. But their heroism is useless; the monster will not forego its prey. The would-be rescuers are also apparently doomed; and it is only by unheard-of efforts, and at great peril of life, that they are at last saved. Still they are so grievously wounded, that they will remain infirm for the rest of their lives, compelled to appeal to public charity for their subsistence."

Then the prosecuting counsel proceeds to paint the disaster at Valpinson in the darkest colours, and with all the resources of his well-known eloquence. He describes the Countess de Claudieuse as she kneels by the side of her dying husband, while the crowd is eagerly pressing around the wounded man and struggling with the flames for the charred remains of the unfortunate firemen. With

increasing vehemence, he proceeds :—" And during all this time what becomes of the author of these fearful misdeeds? When his hatred is gratified, he flees through the wood, and returns to his home. Remorse, there is none. As soon as he reaches the house, he eats, he drinks, he smokes his cigar. His position in the country is such, and the precautionary measures he has taken appear to him so well chosen, that he thinks he is above suspicion. He is calm. He feels so perfectly safe, that he neglects the commonest precautions, and does not even take the trouble of pouring out the water in which he has washed his hands, blackened as they are by the fire he has just kindled. He forgets that the torch of Providence illumines and guides human justice. For, how, indeed, could the law ever have expected to find the guilty man in one of the most magnificent chateaux of the country, had it not been for a direct intervention of Providence?

" For the incendiary and the assassin was actually there, at the Chateau de Boiscoran. And let no one come and tell us that Jacques de Boiscoran's past life is such as to protect him against the formidable charges that are brought against him. We know his past life, one of those idle young men who spend in riotous living a fortune painfully amassed by their forefathers. Jacques de Boiscoran had not even a profession. Useless to society, a burden to himself, he passed through life like a ship without a rudder and without a compass, indulging in all kinds of unhealthy pastime, in order to occupy the hours that weighed so heavily upon him. And yet he was ambitious; but his ambition lay in the direction of those dangerous and wicked intrigues which inevitably lead men to crime. Hence we see him mixed up in all those sterile and wanton party movements which discredit our days, hence we see him uttering over and over again hollow phrases in condemnation of all that is noble and sacred, appealing to the most execrable passions of the multitude—"

" At these words M. Magloire springs to his feet,—" If this is a political affair," he cries, " we ought to have been informed beforehand."

The advocate-general.—" There is no question of politics

here. We speak of the life of a man who has been an apostle of strife."

M. Magloire.—"Does the advocate-general fancy he is preaching peace?"

President.—"I request the counsel for the defence not to interrupt."

Advocate-general.—"And it is in this ambition of the accused that we must look for the motive of the terrible hatred which led him to commit such crimes. That lawsuit about a stream of water is a matter of comparatively little importance. But Jacques de Boiscoran was preparing to become a candidate for election."

"I never dreamed of it," ejaculates the accused, but the advocate-general, disregarding the interruption, proceeds:—"He did not say so: but his friends said it for him, and stalked the district, repeating that by his position, his wealth, and his opinions, he was the man most worthy of Republican votes. And he would have had an excellent chance, if there had not stood between him and the object of his desires the Count de Claudieuse, who had already more than once succeeded in defeating similar plots."

M. Magloire—(warmly).—"Do you refer to me?"

Advocate-general.—"I allude to no one."

M. Magloire.—"You might, just as well say at once, that my friends as well as myself are all M. de Boiscoran's accomplices; and that we have employed him to rid us of a formidable adversary."

Advocate-general.—"Gentlemen, I have indicated to you the real motive of the crime. Hence that hatred which the accused is unable to conceal any longer, which overflows in invectives, which breaks forth in threats of death, and which actually carries him so far that he points his gun at the Count de Claudieuse."

The advocate-general next proceeds to examine the charges, which, he declares are overwhelming and irrefutable. "But what need is there of such inquiry," he exclaims, "after the crushing evidence of the Count de Claudieuse? You have heard it. On the point of appearing before God, he has spoken. His first impulse was to follow the generous nature of his heart, and to pardon the man who had attempted his life. He desired to save him; but, as he felt death come nearer and nearer,

he saw that he had no right to shield a criminal from the sword of justice; he remembered that there were other victims beside himself. And then, rising from his bed of agony, he dragged himself here into court, in order to tell you, 'That is the man! By the light of the fire which he had kindled, I saw him and recognised him. He is the guilty one!'

"Gentlemen of the jury, can you hesitate after this evidence? No! I can not and will not believe it. After such crimes, society expects that justice should be done,—justice in the name of the Count de Claudieuse, who is dying,—justice in the name of those who are already dead—justice in the name of Bolton's mother, and of Guillebault's widow and her five children."

A murmur of approbation accompanies M. de la Gransierre's last words, and continues for some time after he has concluded. There is not a woman in the whole assembly who does not shed tears.

As M. Magloire has so far alone taken an active part in the defence, it is generally believed that he will next speak. But it is not so, for M. Folgat now rises from his seat. The Sauveterre court-house has at various times re-echoed the words of almost all our great masters of forensic eloquence. We have heard Berryer, Dufaure, Jules Favre, and others; but, even after these illustrious orators, M. Folgat still succeeds in astonishing and moving us deeply. We can, of course, report here only a few of his phrases; and we must utterly abandon all hope of giving an idea of his proud and disdainful attitude, his admirable manner, full of authority, and especially of his full rich voice, which finds its way into every heart.

"To defend certain men against certain charges," he begins, "would be to insult them. They cannot be touched. To the portrait drawn by the prosecution, I shall simply oppose the answer given by the venerable priest of Brechy. What did he tell you? That M. de Boiscoran is the best and most honourable of men. There is the truth; our adversaries wish to make out that he is a political intriguer. He had, it is true, a desire to be useful to his country, But, while others debated, he acted. The militia of Sauveterre will tell you to what passions he appealed before the enemy, and by what intrigues he won the cross which General Chanzy himself

fastened to his breast. He coveted power, you say. No: he wished for happiness. You speak of a letter written by him on the evening of the crime, to his betrothed. I challenge you to read it. It covers four pages: before you have read two, you will be forced to abandon the case."

Then the young advocate repeats the evidence given by the accused; and really under the influence of his eloquence all the charges seem to fall to the ground. "And now," he continues, "what other evidence does there remain? The evidence given by the Count de Claudieuse. It is crushing, you say. I say it is singular. What? here is a witness who sees his last hour drawing nigh, and who yet waits for the final minutes of his life before he speaks. And you think that is natural? You pretend that it was generosity which kept him silent. I—I ask you how the most cruel enemy could have acted more atrociously? 'Never was a case clearer,' says the prosecution. On the contrary, I maintain that never was a case more obscure; and that, so far from fathoming the secret of this affair, the prosecution has not sounded its first depth."

M. Folgat resumes his seat, and the ushers have to interfere to prevent applause from breaking out. If the verdict had been taken at that moment, M. de Boiscoran would have been acquitted. But the proceedings are suspended for a quarter of an hour; and in the meantime the lamps are lighted, for night begins to fall. When the president resumes his chair, he calls upon the advocate-general.

"I shall not reply as I had at first proposed," says M. du Lopt de la Gransiere. "The Count de Claudieuse is about to pay with his life for the effort he made to give his evidence in person. He cannot even be carried home. He is perhaps at this very moment drawing his last breath upon earth in the adjoining room."

The counsel for the defence do not desire to address the jury; and, as the accused also declares that he has nothing more to say, the president sums up, and the jurymen withdraw to deliberate. The heat is overwhelming, the restraint almost unbearable; and all faces bear the marks of oppressive fatigue: still nobody thinks of leaving the hall. A thousand contradictory reports circulate through the excited crowd. Some say that the Count de

Claudieuse is dead; others, on the contrary, report him better, and add that he has sent for the priest from Brechy.

At last, at a few minutes after nine o'clock, the jury reappear. They declare Jacques de Boiscoran guilty, and, on the score of extenuating circumstances, he is sentenced to twenty years' hard labour.

PART III.

COCOLEU.

I.

THUS M. Galpin-Daveline triumphed, and M. du Lopt de la Gransiere had reason to be proud of his eloquence. Jacques de Boiscoran had been found guilty. But he looked calm, and even haughty, when the president, M. Domini, pronounced the sentence of the law. That very morning, a few moments before the beginning of the trial, at a last interview with Denise, he had said,—“I know what is in store for me; but I am innocent. They shall not see me turn pale, nor hear me ask for mercy.”

And, gathering up all the energy of which the human heart is capable, he had made a supreme effort at the decisive moment, and kept his word. Turning quietly to his counsel at the instant when the last words of the president were lost among the din of the crowd, he said,—“Did I not tell you that the day would come when you yourself would be the first to put a weapon into my hands?”

M. Folgat rose promptly. He showed neither the anger nor the disappointment of an advocate who has just lost a cause which he knew to be just. “That day has not yet come,” he replied. “Remember your promise. As long as there remains a ray of hope, we shall fight. Now we have much more than mere hope at this moment. In less than a month, in a week, perhaps to-morrow, we shall have our revenge.”

The unfortunate man shook his head. “I shall nevertheless have undergone the disgrace of a condemnation,” he murmured. Then taking the ribbon of the Legion of Honour from his button hole, he handed it to M. Folgat saying,—“Keep this in memory of me, and if I never regain the right to wear it—”

But he was interrupted, by a sergeant of gendarmes—one of those appointed to guard him:—"We must go, sir," said the soldier, "Come, come! You need not despair. You need not lose courage. All is not over yet. There is still the appeal to the Cour de Cassation, and then the petition for pardon, not to speak of what may happen, and cannot be foreseen."

M. Folgat being allowed to accompany the prisoner, was getting ready to do so; but Jacques interposed, and in a mournful voice exclaimed, "No, my friend; please leave me alone. Others have more need of your presence than I have. Denise, my poor father, my mother. Go to them. Tell them that the horror of my condemnation lies in the thought of their sufferings. May they forgive me for the affliction and disgrace I cause them." Then, pressing his counsels' hands he added,—“And you, my friends, how shall I ever express to you my gratitude? Ah! if incomparable talents, and matchless zeal and ability had sufficed, I know I should be free. But instead of that”—in saying this he pointed to the little door through which he was about to pass, and in a heart-rending tone, continued, “Instead of that, there is the door to the galleys. Henceforth—”

A sob cut short his words. His strength was exhausted; for if there are, so to say, no limits to the spirit's power of endurance, the body's energy has its bounds. Still refusing the arm which the sergeant offered him, he left the hall unsupported. M. Magloire was well-nigh beside himself with grief. “Ah! why could we not save him?” he said to his young colleague. “Let them come and speak to me again of the power of conviction. But we must not stay here: let us go!”

They threw themselves into the crowd, which was slowly dispersing, still under the influence of the excitement undergone that day. A strange re-action was already beginning to set in,—a re-action perfectly illogical, and yet intelligible, and by no means rare under similar circumstances. Jacques de Boiscoran, an object of general execration as long as he was only suspected, regained the sympathy of all directly he was condemned. It was as if the fatal sentence had wiped out the horror of the crime. He was pitied; his fate was deplored; and as people thought of his family, his mother, and his betrothed, they almost cursed

the severity of the judges. Besides, even the least observant among those present had been struck by the singular course which the proceedings had taken. There was not one, probably, in the vast assembly, who did not feel that there was a mysterious and unexplored side of the case, which neither the prosecution nor the defence had chosen to approach. Why had Cocoleu been mentioned only once and then quite incidentally? He was an idiot, to be sure; but it was nevertheless through his evidence alone that suspicions had been aroused against M. de Boiscoran. Why had he not been summoned either by the prosecution or by the defence?

The Count de Claudieuse's evidence, although apparently so conclusive at the moment it was given, was also now severely criticised. The most indulgent of the speakers remarked:—"That was not well done. Why did he not speak out before? People do not wait for a man to be down before they strike him."

Others added,—“And did you notice how M. de Boiscoran and the Count de Claudieuse looked at each other? Did you hear what they said to each other? One might have sworn that there was something else, something very different from a mere lawsuit, between them.”

On all sides moreover people repeated,—“At all events, M. Folgat is right. The whole matter is far from being cleared up. The jury were a long while before they agreed. Perhaps M. de Boiscoran might have been acquitted, if, at the last moment, M. de la Gransiere had not announced the impending death of the Count de Claudieuse in the adjoining room.”

As M. Magloire and M. Folgat passed through the crowd they listened to these remarks, with great satisfaction; for, despite all the assertions to the contrary, public opinion will always find an echo in court; and, more frequently than we think, public opinion dictates the verdict of the jury. “And now,” said M. Magloire to his young colleague, “now we may be content. I know Sauveterre by heart. I tell you public opinion is henceforth on our side.”

By dint of perseverance they had just made their way out of the court, when one of the ushers stopped them, saying that the prisoner's family wished to see them in M. Mechinet's office, where the Marchioness de Boiscoran had been carried, when she was taken ill. There indeed

it was that MM. Magloire and Folgat found Jacques's mother reclining in an easy-chair, with closed eyes and parted lips. Her livid pallor and her stiff limbs gave her a death-like aspect; but, from time to time, spasms shook her whole body, from head to foot. M. de Chandore stood on one side, and the marquis, her husband, on the other, watching her with mournful eyes and in perfect silence. They seemed thunderstruck; indeed from the moment when the fatal sentence fell upon their ears, neither of them had uttered a word. Denise alone seemed to have preserved the faculty of reasoning and the power of motion. But her face was well-nigh purple; while her dry eyes shone with a painful light; and her body shook as with fever.

As soon as the two advocates appeared, she cried to them,—“And you call this human justice?” Finding they did not reply,—she added,—“Here is Jacques condemned to hard labour; that is to say, judicially dishonoured, lost, disgraced, for ever cut off from human society. He is innocent; but that does not matter. His best friends will know him no longer; no hand will touch his hand hereafter; and even those who were most proud of his affection will pretend to have forgotten his name.”

“I understand your grief but too well, mademoiselle,” said M. Magloire.

“My grief is not as great as my indignation,” she retorted. “Jacques must be avenged, and he shall be avenged! I am only twenty, and he is not thirty yet: we can devote the life before us to his rehabilitation; for I do not mean to abandon him. His undeserved misfortunes make him a thousand times dearer to me. I was his betrothed this morning; this evening I am his wife. His condemnation was our nuptial benediction. And if it is true, as grandpapa says, that the law prohibits a prisoner to marry the woman he loves, well, I will be his without marriage.”

Denise spoke so loud that it seemed as if she wanted all the world to hear what she was saying. “Ah! let me reassure you by a single word, mademoiselle,” said M. Folgat. “We have not yet come to that. The sentence is not final.”

The Marquis de Boiscoran and M. de Chandore started. “What do you mean?”

"An oversight which M. Galpin has committed makes the whole proceedings null and void. You will ask how a man of his character, so painstaking and so formal, should have made such a blunder. Probably because he was blinded by passion. Why has nobody noticed this oversight? Because fate owed us this compensation. There can be no question about the matter. The defect is a defect of form; and the law provides expressly for the case. The sentence must be declared void, and we shall have another trial."

"And you never told us anything of it!" exclaimed Denise.

"We hardly dared to think of it," replied M. Magloire. "It was one of those secrets which we dared not confide to our own pillows. Remember, that, in the course of the proceedings, the error might have been corrected at any time. Now it is too late. We have time before us; and the conduct of the Count de Claudieuse relieves us from all restraint of delicacy. The veil shall be torn aside now."

He was interrupted by the opening of the door. Red with anger, and darting fiery glances from over his gold spectacles, Dr Seignebos darted into the room. "And the Count de Claudieuse?" asked M. Folgat, eagerly.

"He is in the room close by," replied the doctor. "They have laid him on a mattress, and his wife is by his side. What a profession ours is! Here is a man, a wretch, whom I should be most happy to strangle with my own hands; and I am compelled to do all I can to recall him to life: I must lavish my attentions upon him, and have to seek every means to relieve his sufferings."

"Is he any better?"

"Not at all! Unless a special miracle should be performed on his behalf, he will only leave the court-house, feet forward, and that in twenty-four hours. I have not concealed it from the countess; and I have told her, that, if she wishes her husband to die in peace with heaven, she has only just time to send for a priest."

"And has she sent for one?"

"Not at all! She told me her husband would be terrified by the appearance of a priest, that it would hasten his end. Even when the good priest from Brechy came of his own accord, she sent him off unceremoniously."

"Ah, the miserable woman!" cried Denise. And, after a moment's reflection, she added, as if speaking to herself, "And yet, that may be our salvation. Yes, certainly. Why should I hesitate? Wait for me here: I shall soon be back."

She hurriedly left the room. Her grandfather was about to follow her; but M. Folgat stopped him. "Let her go," he said,—“let her do what she wishes!”

It had just struck ten o'clock. The Sauveterre court-house, but a few minutes previous as full and as noisy as a bee-hive, was now silent and deserted. In the immense waiting hall, badly lighted by a smoky lamp, there were only two men to be seen. One was the priest from Brechy, who was praying on his knees close to a door; the other was one of the official attendants who walked slowly to and fro. Denise went towards the latter. "Where is the Count de Claudieuse?" she asked.

"There, mademoiselle," replied the man, pointing to the door before which the priest was praying,—“there, in the public prosecutor's private office.”

"Who is with him?"

"His wife, mademoiselle, and a servant."

"Well, go in and tell the Countess de Claudieuse,—but so that her husband does not hear you,—that Mademoiselle de Chandore desires to see her for a few moments."

The attendant made no objection, and went in. Quickly returning, he exclaimed, "Madame, the countess sends word that she cannot leave her husband, who is very weak."

Denise stopped him by an impatient gesture. "Never mind! Go back and tell the countess, that, if she does not come out, I shall go in this moment; that, if it must be, I shall force my way in; that I shall call for help; that nothing will keep me away, for I must absolutely see her."

"But, mademoiselle."

"Go! Don't you see that it is a question of life and death?"

There was such authority in her voice, that the attendant no longer hesitated. He went in once more, and reappeared a moment after, telling her to enter. She did so, and found herself in a little ante-room which preceded the public prosecutor's private office. A large lamp stood on the table. The door leading to the chamber in which the

count was lying was closed. In the centre of this ante room stood the Countess de Claudieuse. All these successive blows had not broken her indomitable energy. She looked pale, but calm. "Since you insist upon it, mademoiselle," she began, "I come to tell you myself that I cannot listen to you. Are you not aware that I am standing between two open graves,—that of my poor girl, who is dying at my house, and that of my husband, who is breathing his last in there?"

She stepped back as if to retire; but Denise stopping her by a threatening look, exclaimed in a trembling voice, "If you go back into that room where your husband is, I shall follow you, and I shall speak before him. I shall ask you in his presence, how you dare order a priest away from his bedside at the moment of death, and whether, after having robbed him of all his happiness in life, you mean to make him unhappy in all eternity."

Instinctively the countess drew back again. "I do not understand you," she said.

"Yes, you do understand me, madame. Why deny it? Do you not see that I know everything, and that I have guessed what they have not told me? Jacques was your lover; and your husband has had his revenge."

"Ah!" cried the countess, "that is too much; that is too much!"

"And you permitted it," continued Denise, with breathless haste; "and you did not come and cry out in open court that your husband was a false witness! What a woman you must be! You do not care if your love carries a poor unfortunate man to the galleys. You mean to live on with the thought in your heart that the man whom you love is innocent, and, nevertheless, disgraced for ever, and cut off from human society. A priest might induce the count to retract his statement, as you know very well; hence you refuse to let the priest from Brechy come to his bedside. And what is the end and aim of all your crimes? To save your false reputation as an honest woman. Ah! how miserable, how mean, how infamous!"

The countess was roused at last. What all M. Folgat's skill and ability had not been able to accomplish, Denise obtained in an instant by the force of her passion. Throwing aside her mask, Madame de Claudieuse exclaimed with a perfect burst of rage, "Well, then, no, no! I have not

acted so, and permitted all this to happen because I care for my reputation. My reputation!—what does it matter? Only a week ago, when Jacques succeeded in escaping from prison, I offered to fly with him. He had only to say a word, and I would have given up my family, my children, my country, everything, for him. He answered, ‘Rather the galleys!’”

In the midst of all her suffering, Denise’s heart filled with unspeakable happiness as she heard these words. Ah! now she could doubt Jacques no longer!

“He has condemned himself, you see,” continued the countess. “I was quite willing to ruin myself for him, but certainly not for another woman.”

“By that other woman—no doubt, you mean me!”

“Yes!—you for whose sake he abandoned me,—you whom he was going to marry,—you with whom he hoped to enjoy long years of happiness—not furtive and sinful like ours, but a legitimate, honourable happiness.”

Tears stood in Denise’s eyes. She was beloved, she knew it, and thought of her rival’s sufferings. “And yet I should have been more generous,” she murmured; and not noticing the savage smile in which the countess indulged, she added, “The proof of it is, that I came to propose a bargain to you.”

“A bargain?”

“Yes. Save Jacques’s life, and, by all that is sacred to me in the world, I promise I will enter a convent: I will disappear, and you shall never hear my name any more.”

The countess’s astonishment was evidently intense, and she looked at Denise with a glance full of doubt and mistrust. Such devotion seemed to her too sublime not to conceal some snare. “You would really do that?” she asked.

“Unhesitatingly.”

“You would make so great a sacrifice for my benefit?”

“For yours? No, madame, for Jacques’s.”

“You love him very dearly, do you?”

“I love him dearly enough to prefer his happiness to my own a thousand times over. Even if I were, so to say, buried in some convent, I should still have the consolation of knowing that he owed his restoration to me; and the thought that he belonged to another would be less terrible to bear than the idea that he is innocent, and yet condemned.”

But, in proportion as Denise thus confirmed her sincerity, the countess's glance grew darker and sterner, and passing blushes mantled her cheek. At last she exclaimed with haughty irony, "Admirable!"

"Madame!"

"You condescend to give up all claim to M. de Boiscoran. Will that make him love me? You know very well he will not. You know that he loves you alone. Heroism with such conditions is easy enough. What have you to fear? Buried in a convent, he will love you only all the more ardently, and he will execrate me all the more fervently."

"He shall never know anything of our bargain!"

"Ah! What does that matter? He will guess it, if you do not tell him. No: I know what awaits me. For two years I have felt positive agony at seeing him grow daily more estranged from me. What have I not done to keep him near me! How I have stooped to meanness, to falsehood, to keep him a single day longer, perhaps a single hour! But all was useless. I was a burden to him. He loved me no longer; and my love became to him a heavier load than the cannon-ball which they will fasten to his convict's chains."

Denise shuddered. "That is horrible!" she murmured.

"Horrible! yes, but true. You look amazed. That is because you have as yet only seen the dawn of love: wait for the dark evening, and you will understand me. Is not every woman's story the same? I have seen Jacques at my feet as you see him at yours: the vows he swears to you, he once swore to me; and he swore them to me with the same voice, tremulous with passion, and with the same burning glances. But you are his betrothed, and I never was. Still what does that matter? What does he tell you? That he will love you for ever, because his love is under the protection of God and men. He told me, precisely because our love was not thus protected, that we should be united by indissoluble bonds,—bonds stronger than all others. You have his promise: so had I. And the proof of it is that I gave him everything,—my honour and the honour of my family, and that I would have given him still more, if there had been any more to give. And now to be betrayed, forsaken, despised, to sink lower and lower, until at last I must become the object of your pity! To have

fallen so low, that you should dare come to me and offer to give up Jacques for my benefit! Ah, that is maddening! And I should let the vengeance I hold in my hands slip from me at your bidding! I should be stupid enough, blind enough, to allow myself to be touched by your hypocritical tears! I should secure your happiness by the sacrifice of my reputation! No, no, cherish no such hope!" Her voice expired in her throat in a kind of toneless rattle. She took a few hasty steps up and down the ante-room. Then placing herself in front of Denise, and looking fixedly into her eyes, she asked, "Who suggested to you this plan of coming here, this supreme insult which you have tried to inflict upon me?"

Denise was seized with unspeakable horror, and hardly found heart to reply. "No one," she murmured.

"M. Folgat?"

"He knows nothing of it."

"And Jacques?"

"I have not seen him. The thought occurred to me quite suddenly, like an inspiration from heaven. When Dr. Seignebos told me that you had refused to admit the priest from Brechy, I said to myself, 'This is the last misfortune and the greatest of all! If the Count de Claudieuse dies without retracting, Jacques's innocence can never be fully established, whatever may happen hereafter, whatever proof of it we may find.' Then I made up my mind to come to you. Ah! it was a hard task. But I was in hopes I might touch your heart, or that you might be moved by the greatness of my sacrifice."

And the countess *was* moved. As she listened to Denise's passionate entreaties her resolution seemed to waver. "Would it be such a very great sacrifice?" she asked.

Tears sprang to Denise's eyes. "Alas!" she said, "I offer you my life. I know very well you will not long be jealous of me."

She was interrupted by groans, coming from the room in which the count was lying. The countess set the door ajar, and immediately a feeble, and yet imperious voice was heard exclaiming,—*"Genevieve, Genevieve!"*

"I am coming, in a moment," replied the countess. Then closing the door again she turned to Mademoiselle de Chandore, and added in a hard, stern voice, "What security can you give me, that if Jacques's innocence were

established, and he restored to society, you would not forget your promises?"

"Ah, madame! upon what shall I swear that I am ready to disappear? Choose your own securities, I will do whatever you require." Then, sinking down on her knees before the countess, she continued,—“Here I am at your feet, madame, humble and suppliant,—I whom you accuse of a desire to insult you. Have pity on Jacques! Ah! if you loved him as much as I do, you would not hesitate.”

The countess raised her quickly, and, holding her hands in her own, looked at her for a moment without saying a word, but with heaving bosom and trembling lips. At last in a voice which was so deeply affected, that it was hardly intelligible, she asked,—“What do you want me to do?”

“To induce the Count de Claudineuse to retract.”

The countess shook her head. “It would be useless to try. You do not know the count. He is a man of iron. You might tear his flesh with hot iron pincers, and he would not take back even one of his words. You cannot conceive what he has suffered, nor the depth of the hatred, rage, and thirst for vengeance, which have accumulated in his heart. It was to torture me that he brought me here to his bedside. Only five minutes ago he told me that he died content, since Jacques was declared guilty, and condemned through his evidence.” Madame de Claudieuse was conquered; her energy was exhausted; tears came to her eyes. “He has been so cruelly tried!” she added. “He loved me to distraction, he loved nothing in the world but me. And I— Ah, if we could know, if we could foresee! No, I shall never be able to induce him to retract.”

Denise almost forgot her own great grief, in presence of the countess's agony. “Nor do I expect you to obtain that result,” she said very gently.

“Who then could obtain it?”

“The priest from Brechy. He will surely find words to shake even the firmest resolution. He can speak in the name of that God, who, even on the cross, forgave those who crucified him.”

For one moment longer the countess hesitated; and then finally overcoming the last rebellious impulses of pride, she said,—“Well, I will call the priest.”

“And I, madame, swear I will keep my promise,” answered Denise; but the countess stopped her, and making

a supreme effort over herself, rejoined,—“No : I will try to save Jacques without making conditions. Let him be yours. He loves you, and you were ready to sacrifice your life for his sake. He forsakes me ; but I sacrifice my honour to him. Farewell !”

And hastening to the door, while Denise returned to her friends, she called the priest from Brechy.

II.

M. DAUBIGEON, the public prosecutor, learnt next morning from his substitute that the proceedings in the Boiscoran case were null and void on account of a fatal error in form. The counsel of the defence had lost no time, for after spending the whole night in consultation, they had already made an application for a new trial. Worthy M. Daubigeon took no pains to conceal his satisfaction. “Ah” cried he, “this will worry my friend Galpin, and clip his wings considerably ; and yet I frequently called his attention to the lines of Horace, in which he speaks of Phaeton’s sad fate, and says,—

‘Terret ambustus Phaeton avaras
Spes. . .’

But he would not listen to me, forgetting, that, without prudence, force is a danger.

‘Vis consilii expers mole ruit sua.’ . .

So there he is now, in great difficulty, I am sure.”

Speaking in this fashion, the public prosecutor hastened to dress, intending to go and see M. Galpin-Daveline without delay, ostensibly with the object of accurately learning all the details, but, in reality, in order to enjoy to his heart’s content the ambitious investigating magistrate’s discomfiture.

He found him in a furious rage. “I am disgraced,” exclaimed M. Galpin-Daveline ; “I am ruined ; I am lost. All my prospects, all my hopes are gone. I shall never be forgiven for such an oversight.”

To look at M. Daubigeon, you would have thought he was sincerely distressed. “Is it really true,” he said with

an air of assumed pity,—“is it really true, that you made this unlucky mistake?”

“Yes, alas it is! I forgot one of those wretched details which a schoolboy knows by heart. Can you understand it? And to say that no one noticed my inconceivable blindness! Neither the accusation chamber, nor the advocate-general, nor the presiding judge, ever said a word about it. It is my fate. And that is to be the result of all my labours. Everybody no doubt, said, ‘Oh! M Galpin has the case in hand; he knows all about it: no need to look after the matter when such a man has to deal with it.’ And here I am. Oh! I could almost kill myself.”

“The more so,” replied M. Daubigeon, “since the case hung on a mere thread yesterday.”

The investigating magistrate gnashed his teeth. “Yes, on a mere thread,” he replied, “thanks to M. Domini! whose weakness I cannot comprehend, and who did not at all know, or was not willing to know, how to make the most of the evidence. But it was Du Lopt de la Gransiere’s fault quite as much. Why did he drag politics into the affair? And whom did he want to hit? Why M. Magloire, a man whom everybody respects, and who had three warm personal friends among the jurymen. I told him beforehand that he would get into trouble. But there are people who won’t listen. M. de la Gransiere wants to be elected himself. It is the monomania of the hour: everybody wants to be a deputy. I wish heaven would confound all ambitious men!”

For the first time in his life, and no doubt for the last time also, the public prosecutor sincerely rejoiced at another’s misfortune. Apparently taking a savage pleasure in probing his colleague’s wounds, he now remarked,—“No doubt M. Folgat’s speech had something to do with it.”

“Oh no! nothing at all.”

“But he was brilliantly successful.”

“He merely took people by surprise with his big voice, and grand, rolling sentences.”

“But still—”

“Why, what did he say, after all? That the prosecution did not know the real secret of the case. That is absurd!”

“The new judges may not think so, however.”

"We shall see."

"This time M. de Boiscoran's defence will be very different. He will spare nobody. He is down now, and cannot fall any lower.

'Qui jacet in terra non habet unde cadat.'"

"That may be. But he also risks having a less indulgent jury, and not getting off with twenty years."

"What do his counsel say?"

"I don't know. But I have just sent my clerk to find out; and, if you choose to wait—"

M. Daubigeon did wait, and he did well; for M. Mechinet came in soon afterwards, outwardly with a long face, but inwardly much delighted. "Well?" asked M. Galpin eagerly. The clerk shook his head, and, in a melancholy voice, replied,—“I have never seen anything like this. How fickle public opinion is, after all! The day before yesterday M. de Boiscoran could not have passed through the town without being mobbed. If he should show himself to-day, they would carry him in triumph. He has been condemned, and now he is a martyr. It is known already that the sentence is void, and people are delighted. My sisters have just told me that the ladies of Sauveterre propose to give the Marchioness de Boiscoran and Mademoiselle de Chandore some public proof of their sympathy. The members of the bar too will invite M. Folgat to a public dinner.”

"How monstrous!" exclaimed M. Galpin Daveline.

"Don't you know," said M. Daubigeon, "'the opinions of mankind are more fickle and changeable than the waves of the sea.'"

But, interrupting the quotation, M. Galpin asked his clerk,—“Well, what else?”

"I gave M. de la Gransiere the letter you sent me with."

"What did he say?"

"I found him in consultation with the president, M. Domini. He took the letter, glanced at it rapidly, and said in a cold tone, 'All right.' To tell the truth, I thought that he was in reality furious, in spite of his calm stiff air."

The magistrate looked utterly dismayed. "I can't stand it," he said with a deep sigh, "These men with poison, not blood in their veins, never forgive one."

"But the day before yesterday, you thought very highly of him."

"Oh, the day before yesterday he did not look upon me as the cause of a great misfortune."

M. Mechinet now spoke again. "After leaving M. de la Gransiere," he said, "I went to the court-house, and heard the great news, which has set all the town agog. The Count de Claudieuse is dead."

M. Daubigeon and M. Galpin-Daveline exchanged a glance, and exclaimed, in the same breath, "Good heavens! Is that true?"

"He breathed his last this morning, just before six o'clock. I saw his body in the advocate-general's private room. The priest from Brechy was there, with two priests of the town. They were waiting for a bier to have him carried to his house."

"Poor man!" murmured M. Daubigeon.

"But I heard a great deal more," Mechinet added, "from the attendant who was on duty last night. He told me, that when the trial was over, and it became known that the Count de Claudieuse was likely to die, the priest from Brechy came, and asked to be allowed to offer him the last consolations of his church. However the countess refused to admit him to her husband's bedside. The attendant was amazed at this; but suddenly Mademoiselle de Chandore appeared, and sent word to the countess that she wanted to speak with her."

"Is it possible?"

"Quite certain. They remained together for more than a quarter of an hour. What did they say? The attendant told me he was dying with curiosity to know; but he could hear nothing, because the priest from Brechy was all the while kneeling before the door and praying. When Mademoiselle de Chandore came away, she looked terribly excited. Then the countess called in the priest, and he stayed with the count till he died."

M. Daubigeon and M. Galpin-Daveline had not yet recovered from the amazement into which this story had thrown them, when somebody knocked timidly at the door. "Come in!" cried Mechinet.

The door opened, and a sergeant of gendarmes appeared. "I have been sent by the advocate-general," he said; "to tell you we have just caught Frumence Cheminot."

1

"The fellow who escaped from jail?"

"Yes. We were about to carry him back there, when he told us that he had a secret to reveal, a very important, urgent secret, concerning the condemned prisoner, Boiscoran."

"Indeed!"

"Yes. So we took him to the court-house and I have come for orders."

"Run and say, I am coming to see him!" cried M. Daubigeon. "Make haste! I am coming after you." Then turning to M. Galpin-Daveline he added excitedly, "We must know what this means at once."

"You will permit me to accompany you, I hope?" asked the investigating magistrate; who, receiving an affirmative reply, hastily donned his hat and overcoat. Then off they went, Mechinet following them as they hastened down the street, where the townsfolk, surprised by their flurried demeanour, opined that something very important must have happened. On drawing near to the court-house they were forced to slacken their pace; for a dense crowd—waiting for the removal of the Count de Claudieuse's remains—occupied all the approaches. Suddenly the hubbub caused by four or five hundred excited voices was hushed; hats were raised, the crowd divided; and a passage was opened.

On the threshold of the palace appeared the priest from Brechy with two of his colleagues, behind whom came various attendants from the hospital, carrying a bier covered with black cloth. Beneath the latter the outlines of a human body could be seen. Several women in the crowd began to cry; and those who had room enough knelt down. "Poor countess!" one of them murmured. "Here is her husband dead, and they say one of her daughters is dying at home."

M. Daubigeon, the investigating magistrate, and Mechinet were too preoccupied with other matters to think of stopping here. They made their way into the building, and hastened to the clerk's office, where the gendarmes who had taken Frumence were now guarding him.

He rose as soon as he recognised the officials and respectfully took off his cap. It was really Frumence; but the vagrant did not have his usual careless appearance. He looked pale, and was evidently very excited.

"Well," said M. Daubigeon, "so you have allowed yourself to be captured?"

"I beg your pardon," replied the poor fellow, "I was not retaken. I came of my own accord."

"Involuntarily, you mean?"

"Quite by my own free will! Just ask the sergeant."

The sergeant stepped forward, touched his cap, and reported,—*"That's the truth. Frumence came himself to the barracks and said, 'I surrender as a prisoner. I wish to speak to the public prosecutor, and give important evidence.'"*

The vagabond drew himself up proudly,—*"You see, sir,"* said he, *"I did not lie. While these gentlemen were galloping all over the country in search of me, I was snugly ensconced in a garret at the Mouton Rouge, and did not think of coming out again, till it was entirely forgotten,"*

"Yes; but people who lodge at the Mouton Rouge have to pay, and you have no money."

Frumence quietly drew from his pocket a handful of napoleons, together with several five-and-twenty-franc notes. *"You see that I had the wherewithal to pay for my room,"* he said. *"But I surrendered, because, after all, I am an honest man, and I would rather suffer some trouble myself than see an innocent gentleman go to the galleys."*

"M. de Boiscoran?"

"Yes. He is innocent! I know it; I am sure of it and I can prove it. And, if he will not tell the truth, I will tell it—tell everything!"

M. Daubigeon and M. Galpin were utterly astounded. *"Explain yourself,"* they both said in the same breath.

But the vagrant shook his head, pointing to the gendarmes and, like one fully acquainted with all the formalities of the law, he replied,—*"But it is a great secret; and, when one confesses, one does not like anybody else but the priest to know what one has to say. Besides, I should like my deposition to be taken down in writing."*

Upon a sign made by M. Galpin-Daveline, the gendarmes withdrew; and Mechinet took his seat at the table, with a blank sheet of paper before him.

"Now we can talk," said Frumence: *"that's the way I like it. I myself did not think of running away from jail. I was pretty well off there; winter is coming, I hadn't a*

sou ; and, besides I knew, that, if I were recaptured, I should fare rather badly. But M. Jacques de Boiscoran had a notion to spend a night in town."

"Mind what you are saying," interrupted M. Galpin-Daveline, severely. "You cannot play with the law, and get off unpunished."

"May I die if I do not tell the truth!" cried Frumence. "M. Jacques spent a whole night out of jail."

The investigating magistrate trembled. "What an invention!" he exclaimed.

"I have my proof," replied Frumence coldly, "and you shall hear. Well, as he wanted to leave, M. Jacques came to me, and, in consideration of a sum of money which he paid me, and of which you have just seen all that's left, we agreed that I should make a hole in the wall, and run off altogether, while he came back when he had finished his business."

"And the jailer?" asked M. Daubigeon.

Like a true peasant, Frumence was far too cunning to expose Blangin unnecessarily. Assuming, therefore, the whole responsibility of the escape, he replied,—"The jailer knew nothing. We had no need of him. Was not I, so to say, under-jailer? Had not I been charged by you yourself, M. Galpin, to keep watch over M. Jacques? Was it not I who opened and locked his door, who took him to the parlour, and brought him back again?"

This was the exact truth. "Go on!" said M. Galpin harshly.

"Well," continued Frumence, "everything was done as agreed upon. One evening, about nine o'clock, I made a hole in the wall, and there we were, M. Jacques and I, on the ramparts. He slipped a package of bank notes into my hand, and told me to run for it, while he went about his business. I thought he was innocent then, though perhaps that, after all, he meant to go off altogether. I felt very curious on the point, and after hesitating a moment, I determined to find out the truth, and with that object I followed him!"

Although the public prosecutor and the investigating magistrate were accustomed, by the nature of their profession, to conceal their feelings, they could hardly restrain now,—one, the hope trembling within him, and the other, the vague apprehensions which began to fill his heart.

Mechinet, who already knew all that was coming, laughed in his sleeve while his pen flew rapidly over the paper.

"He was afraid he might be recognised," continued the vagrant, "and so he ran ever so fast, keeping close to the wall, and choosing the narrowest lanes. Fortunately I have a pair of good legs. He went through Sauveterre like a race-horse; and, when he reached the Rue Maurec, he rang the bell at a large gate!"

"At the Count de Claudieuse's house!"

"I know now what house it was; but I did not know then. Well, he rings. A servant came and opened. He spoke to her, and immediately she asked him in, and that so eagerly, that she forgot to close the gate again."

At this point M. Daubigeon intervened, and filling up a blank form lying on the table, he rang the bell, and said to an usher who hastened in, "I want this to be taken immediately. Make haste; and not a word!"

Then Frumence was directed to continue. "There I was," said he, "standing in the middle of the street, feeling like a fool. I thought the only thing left was to be off. But that wretched, half-open gate attracted me. I said to myself, 'If you go in, and they catch you, they will think you have come to steal, and you'll have to pay for it.' That was true; but the temptation was too strong; so 'Come what may, I'll risk it,' I said. I pushed the huge gate just wide enough open to let me in, and there I was in a large garden. It was pitch dark; but three windows on the ground floor of the house were lighted up. I had ventured too far now to go back. So I went on, creeping as stealthily as possible until I reached a tree quite close to one of the lighted windows, which belonged to a beautiful room. Hiding behind the tree I looked and saw M. de Boiscoran in the room. As there were no curtains to the windows, I could see him as well as I now see you. His face had a terrible expression, and I was asking myself who he could be waiting for, when I saw him hide behind the open door of the room, like a man lying in wait for somebody, with evil intentions. This troubled me very much; but the next moment a lady came in. Instantly M. Jacques shut the door behind her; the lady turned round, saw him, and wanted to run, uttering at the same time a loud cry. That lady was the Countess de Claudieuse!"

Frumence looked as if he wished to pause so as to watch the effect of his revelation. But Mechainet was so impatient, that he forgot the modest character of his duty, and said hastily,—“Go on; go on!”

“One of the windows was half open,” continued the vagrant, “and thus I could hear almost as well as I saw. I crouched down on all fours, and kept my head on a level with the ground, so as not to lose a word. Oh, it was fearful. At the first word I understood everything: M. Jacques and the Countess de Claudieuse had been lovers.”

“That’s madness!” cried M. Galpin-Daveline.

“Well, I tell you I was amazed. The Countess de Claudieuse—such a pious lady! But I have ears; haven’t I? M. Jacques reminded her of the night of the crime, how they had been together a few minutes before the fire broke out, having agreed some days before to meet near Valpinson that very evening. At this meeting they had burnt their love-letters, and M. Jacques had blackened his fingers badly in burning them.”

“Did you really hear that?” asked M. Daubigeon.

“As I hear you, sir.”

“Write it down, Mechainet,” said the public prosecutor with great eagerness,—“write that down carefully.” There was no fear of the clerk’s neglecting to do so.

Frumence then continued his narrative, describing in full detail the scene he had witnessed, with which the reader is already acquainted. He was frequently interrupted by the ejaculations of the public prosecutor and the investigating magistrate, both of whom could scarcely control their excitement. When the vagrant had finished—having recounted the final episode, when M. de Claudieuse declared that with the view of making Jacques condemnation sure he would swear he had recognised him—there followed a solemn pause. At last in a tremulous voice M. Daubigeon asked, “Why did you not come and tell us all that at once?”

The vagabond shook his head. “I meant to do so,” he replied, “but I was afraid. You ought to understand what I mean. I was afraid I might be punished very severely for having run off.

“Your silence has led the court to commit a grievous mistake.”

"I had no idea M. Jacques would be found guilty. Big people like him, who can pay great lawyers, always get out of trouble. Besides, I did not think the Count de Claudieuse would carry out his threat. To be betrayed by one's wife is hard; but to send an innocent man to the galleys—"

"Still you see—"

"Ah, if I could have foreseen! My intentions were good; and I assure you, although I did not come at once to denounce the whole thing, I was firmly resolved to make a clean breast of it if M. Jacques should get into trouble. And the proof of it is, that instead of running off, and going far away, I very quietly lay concealed at the Mouton Rouge, waiting for the sentence to be published. As soon as I heard what was done last night, I did not lose an hour, and surrendered at once to the gendarmes."

In the meantime M. Galpin had overcome his amazement, and now furiously cried, "This man is an impostor. The money he showed us was paid him to give false evidence. How can we credit his story?"

"We must investigate the matter," replied M. Daubigeon. He rang the bell; and when the usher came in he asked, "Have you done what I told you?"

"Yes, sir," was the reply. "M. de Boiscoran and the Count de Claudieuse's servant are here."

"Bring in the woman: when I ring again, send me M. de Boiscoran."

A tall country-girl, plain of face, and square of figure, now entered. She seemed to be very much excited, and looked very red. "Do you remember," asked M. Daubigeon, "that one night last week a man came to your house, and asked to see your mistress?"

"Oh, yes!" replied the girl. "I did not want to let him in at first; but he said he came from the court, and then I let him enter."

"Would you recognise him?"

"Certainly."

The public prosecutor rang again; the door opened, and Jacques entered, amazement plainly written on his face.

"That's the man!" cried the servant.

"May I know?" asked the prisoner.

"Not yet!" replied M. Daubigeon. "Go back, and be of good hope!"

But Jacques remained standing where he was, looking around him with amazed eyes, and evidently unable to comprehend. How could he have comprehended what was going on? They had taken him out of his cell without warning; they had carried him to the court-house; and here he was confronted with Frumence, whom he thought he should never see again, and with the Countess de Claudieuse's servant. M. Galpin-Daveline looked the picture of consternation; and M. Daubigeon, radiant with delight, bade him be of good hope. Hopeful of what? Why? With what object? He could not tell, but gazed wonderingly at Mechinet, who made him all kinds of signs. At last the usher who had brought him in had actually to push him out of the room.

The public prosecutor then turned again to the servant-girl and said,—“Now, my good girl, can you tell me if anything special happened in connection with this gentleman's visit to your house?”

“There was a quarrel between him, master, and madame.”

“Were you present?”

“No. But I am quite certain of what I say.”

“How so?”

“Well, I will tell you. When I went upstairs to tell the countess that there was a gentleman below who came from the court, she was in a great hurry to go down, and told me to stay with the count, my master. Of course I did what she said. But no sooner was she downstairs than I heard a loud cry. Master heard it too: he raised himself on his pillow and asked me where my mistress was. I told him, and he was just settling down to try and fall asleep again, when the sound of loud voices came up to us. ‘This is very singular,’ said master. I offered to go and see what was the matter, but he told me sharply not to stir an inch. And when the voices became louder and louder he said, ‘I will go down myself. Give me my dressing-gown.’ Sick as he was, exhausted, and almost on his death-bed, it was very imprudent for him to do so; it might easily have cost him his life. I ventured to speak to him; but he swore at me, and told me to keep still, and do as he ordered. I obeyed him. Poor man! He was so weak he could hardly stand up, and had to hold on to a chair while I helped him just to hang his dressing-gown over his

shoulders. Then I asked him if he would not let me help him downstairs. But, looking at me with awful eyes, he said, 'You will do me the favour to stay here, and, whatever may happen, if you dare so much as open the door while I am away, you shall not stay another hour in my service.'

"Then he went out, holding on to the wall; and I remained alone in the chamber, trembling all over, and feeling as sick as if I had known that a great misfortune was going to happen. However, I heard nothing more for a time; and as the minutes passed away, I was just beginning to reproach myself for having been so foolishly alarmed, when I heard two cries; but, O sir! two such fearful, sharp cries, that I felt cold shivers running all over me.

"As I did not dare leave the room, I put my ear to the door, and distinctly heard the count's voice. He was quarrelling with another gentleman. But I did not catch a single word, and could only make out that they were very angry. All of a sudden there was a loud thud, like the fall of some heavy body, and then came another awful cry. I had not a drop of blood left in my veins at that moment. Fortunately the other servants, who were in bed, had heard the noise. They had got up and were now coming down the passage. I left the room at all risks, and went downstairs with the others, and there we found madame fainting in an armchair, and master stretched out at full-length, lying on the floor like a corpse."

"What did I say!" cried Frumence.

But the public prosecutor made him a sign to keep quiet; and turning again to the girl he asked, "And the visitor?"

"He was gone, sir. He had vanished."

"What did you do then?"

"We raised the count; we carried him upstairs and laid him on his bed. Then we brought madame round again; and the valet went in haste to fetch Dr. Seignebos."

"What did the countess say when she recovered her consciousness?"

"Nothing. Mistress looked like a person who had been knocked on the head."

"Was there anything else?"

"Oh, yes, sir!"

"What?"

"The eldest of the young ladies, Mademoiselle Martha, was seized with terrible convulsions."

"How was that?"

"Why, I only know what she told us herself."

"Let us hear what she said."

"Ah! It is a very singular story. When the gentleman whom I have just seen here rang the bell at our gate, Mademoiselle Martha, who had already gone to bed, got up again, and went to the window to see who it was. She saw me go and open the gate, with a candle in my hand, and come back again with the gentleman behind me. She was just going to bed again, when she thought she saw one of the statues in the garden move, and walk right off. We told her it could not be so; but she did not mind us. She told us over and over again that she was quite sure that she saw a statue come up the avenue, and stand behind the tree, which is nearest to the salon-window."

Frumence smiled triumphantly. "That was I!" he cried.

The girl looked at him, and said, only moderately surprised, "That may be quite true."

"What do you know about it?" asked M. Daubigeon.

"I know it must have been a man who had stolen into the garden, and who frightened Mademoiselle Martha so terribly, because in going out, Dr. Seignebos dropped a five-franc piece just at the foot of the tree, where mademoiselle said she had seen the statue standing. The valet who showed the doctor out helped him to look for his money; and during their search they saw the footprints of a man who must have worn iron-shod shoes."

"The marks of my shoes!" interrupted Frumence again; and sitting down, and raising his legs, he said to the magistrate, "Just look at my soles, and you will see there is no lack of iron nails in them!"

"We believe you," said M. Daubigeon with a brief glance, and then turning to the servant he asked, "Can you tell us if, after these occurrences, the Count de Claudieuse had any explanation with your mistress?"

"No, I do not know. Only I saw that the count and the countess were no longer as they used to be with each other."

That was all she knew. She was asked to sign her deposition; and then M. Daubigeon told her she might go.

Turning to Frumence he said to him, "You will be taken to jail now. But you are an honest man, and you need not worry."

The investigating magistrate and the public prosecutor remained alone, for a clerk counts for nothing. "Well," said M. Daubigeon, "what do you think of it?"

M. Galpin was dumbfounded. "It is enough to make one crazy," he murmured.

"Do you begin to see now that M. Folgat was right when he said the case was far from being so clear as you pretended?"

"Ah! who would not have been deceived as I was? You yourself, at one time at least, were of my opinion. And yet, if the Countess de Claudieuse and M. de Boiscoran are both innocent, who is the guilty one?"

"That is what we shall know very soon; for I am determined I will not allow myself a moment's rest till I have found out the truth of the whole matter. How fortunate it was that this fatal error in form should have made the sentence null and void!" M. Daubigeon was so excited that he forgot his never-failing quotations. Turning to the clerk he added, "But we must not lose a minute. Put your legs into active motion, my dear Mechinnet, and run and ask M. Folgat to come here. I will wait for him."

III.

WHEN Denise, after leaving the Countess de Claudieuse, came back to Jacques's parents and friends, she said, radiant with hope,—*"Now victory is on our side!"*

Her grandfather and the Marquis de Boiscoran urged her to explain; but she refused to speak, and only later in the evening did she confess to M. Folgat what she had done, adding that it was more than probable the count would retract his evidence before he died.

"That alone would save Jacques," said the young advocate, and buoyed up by this hope, he prepared for still greater efforts. Overcome as he was by his labours and the emotions of the day, he nevertheless spent the night in Grandpapa Chandore's study, preparing with M. Magloire the application they proposed to make for a new trial. When they finished, it was already broad daylight.

and as M. Folgat did not then care to go to bed, he installed himself in a large easy-chair for the purpose of getting a few hours' rest. He had, however, not taken more than forty winks, when old Anthony roused him with the news that there was an unknown man downstairs who wished to see him instantly.

M. Folgat rubbed his eyes, and at once went down; in the passage he found himself face to face with a somewhat suspicious looking individual, a man about fifty years of age, who wore a moustache and imperial, and was dressed in a tight coat, and baggy trousers, such as old soldiers affect. "Are you M. Folgat?" asked this man, who, on receiving an affirmative reply, rejoined:—"Well, I—I am the agent whom friend Goudar sent to England."

The young lawyer started, and asked—"When did you arrive here?"

"Only this morning. I came by express. Twenty-four hours too late, I know; for I bought a newspaper at the station. M. de Boiscoran has been found guilty. And yet, I swear I did not lose a minute; and I have well earned the gratuity I was promised in case of success."

"You have been successful, have you?"

"Of course. Did I not tell you in my letter from Jersey that I was sure of success?"

"You have found Suky Wood?"

"Yes. Twenty-four hours after I wrote to you,—in a public house at Bouly Bay. She would not come, the wretch!"

"You have brought her, however?"

"Of course. She is at the Hotel de France, where I have left her till I could come and see you."

"Does she know anything?"

"Everything."

"Make haste and bring her here."

When M. Folgat first hoped to find this servant-girl, he determined to make the most of her evidence, whenever she came to hand. Among other things he had slipped a portrait of the Countess de Claudieuse into one of Denise's albums, where there were some thirty other photographs. He now fetched this album, and had just laid it upon the centre-table in the drawing-room, when the agent came back with his captive.

She was a tall, stout woman, some forty years old, with

hard features, and masculine manners; and dressed, like all common Englishwomen, with great pretensions to fashion. When M. Folgat questioned her, she answered in very fair, intelligible French, which was only marred by a strong English accent,—“ I stayed four years at the house in the Rue des Vignes, and I should be there still, but for the war. As soon as I entered upon my duties, I became aware that I was put in charge of a house where two lovers had their meetings. I was not exactly pleased, because, you know, one has one's own self-respect; but it was a good place. I had very little to do, and so I stopped. However, my master mistrusted me; I saw that very clearly. When a meeting was to take place, he always sent me on some errand to Versailles, to Saint Germain, or even to Orleans. This worried me so much that I determined I would find out what they tried so hard to conceal from me. It was not very difficult; and the very next week I knew that my master was no more Sir Francis Burnett than I was: and that he had borrowed the name from one of his friends.”

“ How did you contrive to find this out ? ”

“ Oh! very simply. One day, when my master went away on foot, I followed him, and saw him go into a house in the Rue de l'Universite. Across the road some servants were standing and talking. I asked them who that gentleman was; and they told me he was the son of the Marquis de Boisecoran.”

“ So much for your master; but the lady.”

Suky Wood smiled. “ As for the lady,” she replied, “ I did the same thing to find her out. It cost me, however, a great deal more time and a great deal more patience, because she took such great precautions; and I lost more than one afternoon in watching her. But, the more she tried to hide, the more curious I was to know, as a matter of course. At last, one evening, when she left the house in her carriage, I took a cab and followed her. I thus traced her home, and the next morning I talked to the servants there, and they told me that she was a lady who lived in the provinces, but who came every year to Paris to spend a month with her parents, and that her name was the Countess de Claudieuse.”

And yet Jacques had imagined and strongly maintained

that Suky would not know anything; in fact, that she could not know anything! what an error!

"But did you ever see this lady?" asked M. Folgat.

"As well as I see you."

"Would you recognise her?"

"Among thousands."

"And if you saw her portrait?"

"I should know it at once."

M. Folgat handed her the album.

"Well, look for her," he said.

She had found the likeness in a moment. There was no doubt any longer.

"But now, Miss Suky," said the young advocate, "you will have to repeat all that before a magistrate."

"I will do so with pleasure. It is the truth."

"If that is so, they will send for you to your lodgings, and you will please stay there till you are called. You need not trouble yourself about anything. You shall have whatever you want, and they will pay you your wages as if you were in service."

M. Folgat had not time to say any more; for Dr. Seignebos rushed in with hurricane violence, and cried out at the top of his voice,—*"Victory! We are victorious now! Great victory!"*

Then as soon as Suky and the agent had left the room, he added,—*"I am just from the hospital. I have seen Goudar. He has done it. He made Cocoleu talk."*

"And what does he say?"

"Well, exactly what I knew he would say, as soon as they could loosen his tongue. But you will hear it all; for it is not enough that Cocoleu should confess to Goudar: there must be witnesses present to certify to his statements."

"He will not talk before witnesses."

"He must not see them; they can be concealed. The place is admirably adapted for such a purpose."

"But how, if Cocoleu refuses to talk after the witnesses have been introduced?"

"He won't refuse. Goudar has found out a way to make him talk whenever he likes. Ah! what a clever fellow he is! How thoroughly he understands his business. Have you full confidence in him?"

"Oh, entirely."

"Well, he says he is sure he will succeed. 'Come to-day,' he said to me, 'between one and two, with M. Folgat, the public prosecutor, and M. Galpin-Daveline; put yourselves where I will show you, and then let me go to work.' Then he showed me the place where he wants us to remain, and told me how to let him know when we are all ready."

M. Folgat did not hesitate. "We have not a moment to lose. Let us go at once to the court-house."

But they were hardly in the passage, when they were met by Mechinot, who came up out of breath, and half mad with delight. "M. Daubigeon sends me to say you must come to him at once," he cried. "Great news! Great news!" And immediately he related in a few words the circumstances of Frumence's statement, and the deposition made by the Countess de Claudieuse's maid.

"Ah, now we are safe!" cried Dr. Seignebois.

M. Folgat was pale with excitement. Still he proposed to let the marquis and Denise know what was going on before leaving the house. "No," said the doctor, "no! Let us wait till everything is quite safe. Let us go quickly; let us hasten at once."

They were right to make haste. The investigating magistrate and the public prosecutor were waiting for them with the greatest impatience. As soon as they entered the clerk's office, M. Daubigeon exclaimed,—“Well, I suppose Mechinot has told you all.”

"Yes," replied M. Folgat; "but we have some information which you do not possess." He then told the officials that Suky Wood had arrived, and gave a brief account of her evidence.

M. Galpin had sunk into a chair, completely crushed by the weight of so many proofs of his misapprehension of the case. There he sat without saying a word, without moving a muscle. M. Daubigeon was radiant, however. "Most assuredly," he cried, "Jacques must be innocent!"

"Most assuredly he is innocent!" said Dr. Seignebois; "and the proof of it is, that I know who is guilty."

"Oh!"

"And you will know too, if you will take the trouble to follow me to the hospital."

It was just striking one o'clock, and not one of them had eaten anything that morning. But they had no time to think of breakfast. Without a shadow of hesitation, M. Daubigeon turned to M. Galpin-Daveline, and asked him if he would form one of the party. The luckless investigating magistrate rose mechanically, after the manner of an automaton, and they then left the court-house, creating no small sensation among the good people of Sauveterre, when they thus appeared all together in a group.

M. Daubigon spoke first to the lady superior of the hospital; and, when he had explained to her the purpose of their visit, she raised her eyes heavenward, and said with a sigh of resignation,—“Well, gentlemen, do as you like, and I hope you will be successful; for it is a sore trial for us poor sisters to have these continual visitations in the name of the law.”

“Then, please follow me, gentlemen, to the insane ward,” said the doctor.

What is called the insane ward at the Sauveterre hospital is a little, low building, divided into six cells each of which has two doors,—one opening into a special courtyard reserved to the lunatics, and the other communicating with the main part of the hospital. It was to one of these latter doors—used by the servants and keepers—that Dr. Seignebos led his friends. And after recommending them to kept perfect silence, so as not to rouse Cocoleu's suspicions, he invited them into a cell, the door of which, leading into the lunatics' court-yard, had been closed. There was, however, a small grated window in the upper part of this door, so that, without being perceived, they could easily see and hear all that transpired in the court-yard, where Goudar and Cocoleu were sitting on a wooden bench in the bright sunlight.

By long study and a great effort of will, Goudar had succeeded in giving his face a most perfect expression of stupidity: and even the people belonging to the hospital thought he was more idiotic than his comrade. He held in his hand his violin, the doctor had ordered to be left him; and he accompanied himself with a few notes, as he repeated the song he had sung on the Place du Marche Neuf, when he first accosted M. Folgat.

Cocoleu, a large piece of bread-and-butter in one hand, and a big clasp-knife in the other, was finishing his meal,

But the music delighted him so intensely, that he actually forgot to eat, and with hanging under lip, and half-closed eyes, rocked himself to and fro, keeping time with the measure.

"They look hideous!" murmured M. Folgat. At that moment Goudar, warned by a preconcerted signal, finished his song. He bent forward, and drew from under the bench an enormous bottle, which he put to his lips, imbibing a considerable quantity of some evidently agreeable beverage. A moment afterwards he passed the bottle to Cocoleu, who took a long, eager pull, his face wearing, the while, an expression of idiotic beatitude. Then patting his stomach with his hand, he stammered, "That's—that's—that's good!"

"Ah, I begin to see!" whispered M. Daubigeon to Dr. Seignebos, "I notice from Cocoleu's eyes, that this practice with the bottle must have been going on for some time already. Cocoleu is drunk."

Goudar again took up his violin and repeated his song.

"I—I—want—want to—to drink!" stammered Cocoleu.

Goudar kept him waiting a little while, and then handed him the bottle. The idiot threw back his head, and drank till he had lost his breath.

"Ah! you did not have such good wine to drink at Valpinson?" ejaculated Goudar.

"Oh, yes I did!" replied Cocoleu.

"But, as much as you wanted?"

"Yes. Quite—enough." And laughing with some difficulty, he stammered, "I got—got into the cellar through one of the windows; and I drank—drank through—through a—a straw."

"You must be sorry you are no longer there?"

"Oh, yes!"

"But, if you were so well off at Valpinson, why did you set it on fire?"

The witnesses of this strange scene crowded to the little window of the cell, and held their breath with eager expectation.

"I only wanted to burn some faggots, to make the count come out. It was not my fault, if the whole house got on fire."

"And why did you want to kill the count?"

"Because I wanted the great lady to marry M. de Bois-coran."

"Ah! She told you to do it, did she?"

"Oh, no! But she cried so much; and then she told me she should be so happy if her husband were dead. And she was always kind to Cocoleu; and the count was always bad; and so I shot him."

"Well! But why, then, did you say it was M. de Bois-coran who shot the count?"

"They said at first it was me. I did not like that. I would rather they cut off *his* head than mine." He shuddered as he said this, and Goudar, afraid of having gone rather too fast, took up his violin, and gave him a verse of his song to quiet him. Then still accompanying his words with a few notes, and after allowing Cocoleu to caress the bottle once more, he asked again,—“Where did you get a gun?”

“I—I had taken it from the count to shoot birds; and I—I have it still—still. It is hid in the hole where Michael found me.”

Poor Dr. Seignebos could not stand it any longer. He suddenly pushed open the door, and, rushing into the court-yard, exclaimed,—“Bravo, Goudar! well done!”

At the noise, Cocoleu had started up. He evidently understood it all; for terror instantly drove away the fumes of the wine he had absorbed, and he looked frightened to death. “Ah, you scoundrel!” he howled. And, throwing himself upon Goudar, he plunged his knife twice into him.

The movement was so rapid and so sudden, that it was impossible to prevent it. Pushing M. Folgat violently back as he tried to disarm him, Cocoleu leapt into a corner of the court, and there, looking like some wild beast at bay, with bloodshot eyes and foaming mouth, he threatened with his formidable knife to kill any one who came near him.

Hearing the cries uttered by M. Daubigeon and M. Galpin-Daveline, the hospital assistants came rushing in. The struggle would, however, probably have been a long one, notwithstanding their numbers, if one of the keepers had not, with great presence of mind, climbed to the top of the wall, and caught Cocoleu's arm in a noose. By these means he was thrown down in a moment, disarmed, and rendered harmless. “You—you may—may do—do

what you—you choose; I—I won't say—say another w-w-word!" he stammered.

In the mean time, poor Dr. Seignebos, who had unwillingly caused this catastrophe, was distressed beyond measure; still he hastened to the assistance of Goudar, who lay insensible on the gravel of the court-yard. The two wounds which the detective had received were serious, but not fatal, nor even very dangerous, as the knife had been turned aside by the ribs. He was at once carried into one of the private rooms of the hospital, and soon recovered his consciousness. When he saw all four gentlemen bending anxiously over his bed, he murmured with a mournful smile,—“Well, was I not right when I said that my profession is a rascally one?”

“But you are at liberty now to give up,” replied M. Folgat, “provided always a certain house in the Rue des Vignes should not prove too small for your ambition.”

The detective's pale face was tinged by a passing blush. “Will they really give it to me?” he asked.

“Since you have discovered the real criminal, and handed him over to justice.”

“Well, then, I will bless these wounds: I feel that I shall be right again in a fortnight. Give me pen and ink at once, that I may write my resignation, and tell my wife the good news.”

He was interrupted by the entrance of one of the officers of the court, who came to tell the public prosecutor that the priest of Brechy was waiting to see him at his office.

“I am coming directly,” replied M. Daubigeon. And, turning to his companions, he said,—“Let us go, gentlemen.”

The worthy priest rose quickly from his chair when he saw M. Daubigeon enter, accompanied by M. Galpin-Daveline, M. Folgat, and Dr. Seignebos.

“Perhaps you wish to speak to me alone, sir?” asked M. Daubigeon.

“No, sir,” replied the priest, “no! The words of reparation which have been entrusted to me must be uttered publicly.” And, handing him a letter, he added,—“Read this. Please read it aloud.”

The public prosecutor tore open the envelope with a tremulous hand, and then read as follows:—

"Being about to die in the Christian faith, as I have lived, I owe it to myself, to God whom I have offended, and to those I have deceived, to declare the truth."

"Influenced by hatred, I gave false evidence in court, and wrongfully stated that M. de Boiscoran was the man who shot at me, and that I recognised him in the act.

"I did not recognise him, however, and moreover I know that he is innocent. I am sure of it; and I swear it by all I hold sacred both in this world which I am about to leave, and in that other sphere where I must now appear before my sovereign Judge.

"May M. de Boiscoran forgive me as I myself forgive.

"TRIVULCE DE CLAUDIEUSE."

"Unfortunate man!" murmured M. Folgat.

But the priest had already resumed speaking: "You see, gentlemen, the Count de Claudieuse withdraws his charge unconditionally. He asks for nothing in return: he only wants the truth to be established. And yet I beg leave to express the last wishes of a dying man. I beseech you, in the new trial, to make no mention of the countess's name."

Tears were seen in all eyes.

"Rest assured, reverend father," said M. Daubigeon, "the Count de Claudieuse's last wishes shall be respected. The countess's name shall not be mentioned. There will be no need for it. The secret of her fault shall be religiously kept by those who know it."

It was now four o'clock. An hour later Michael, the Boiscoran tenant's son, who with a gendarme had been sent to ascertain the truth of Cocoleu's statements, returned to Sauveterre with the gun the wretch had employed to perpetrate his crime. As Cocoleu had declared, it was found concealed in the den he had dug out for himself in the forest of Rochepommier, and where Michael had discovered him the day after the crime.

Henceforth Jacques's innocence was as clear as daylight; and, although he had to bear the burden of his sentence till the judgment was declared void, it was decided, with the consent of the president of the court, M. Domini, and the active co-operation of M. du Lopt de la Gransiere, that he should be set free that same evening. M. Folgat and M. Magloire were charged with the pleasant

duty of acquainting the prisoner with this good news. They found him walking up and down his cell like a madman, devoured by unspeakable anguish, and not knowing what to make of the hopeful words which M. Daubigeon had spoken to him in the morning. He was hopeful, it is true; and yet when he was told that he was safe, that he was free, he sank, an inert mass, into a chair, being less able to bear joy than sorrow. But such emotions are not apt to last long. A few moments later and Jacques de Boiscoran, arm in arm with his counsel, left the prison, wherein he had for several months suffered all that an innocent man can suffer. He had paid a fearful penalty for what, in the eyes of so many men, is but a trifling wrong.

When they reached the street in which the Chandores lived M. Folgat said to his client,—“They do not expect you, I am sure. Walk slowly, while I go ahead to prepare them.”

The young advocate found Jacques’s parents and friends assembled in the salon suffering great anxiety; for they had not been able to ascertain what truth there was in the vague rumours which had reached them. M. Folgat employed the utmost caution in preparing them for the truth; but at the first words Denise interrupted him asking:—“Where is Jacques?”

Jacques was kneeling at her feet, overcome with gratitude and love.

V.

ON the following day the funeral of the Count de Claudieuse took place. His youngest daughter was buried at the same time; and in the evening the Countess left Sauveterre, to make her home henceforth with her father in Paris.

In the proper course of the law, the sentence which condemned Jacques was declared null and void; and Cocoleu, found guilty of having committed the crime at Valpinson, was sentenced to hard labour for life.

A month later, Jacques de Boiscoran and Denise de Chandore were married at the church at Brechy. The bridegroom’s witnesses were M. Magloire and Dr. Seigne-

bos; the bride's—M. Folgat and M. Daubigeon. Even the excellent public prosecutor laid aside some of his usual gravity for the occasion, and continually repeated,—

“Nunc est bibendum, nunc pede libero
Pulsanda tellus.”

And, obedient to the quotation, he gaily drank his glass of wine, and opened the ball with the bride.

M. Galpin-Daveline, already sent in exile to Algeria, was not present at the wedding. But M. Mechinet was there, all smiles and happiness, for, thanks to Jacques, he was now quite free from all pecuniary troubles.

By this time the two Blangins, husband and wife, have well-nigh spent the whole of the money they extorted from Denise. Frumence, as park-keeper at Boiscoran, is the terror of all vagrants: while Goudar, in his garden in the Rue des Vignes, grows the finest peaches in Paris.

THE END.

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